

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW

BY

A. CONAN DOYLE

Author of

“Sherlock Holmes,” “The White Company”
Etc., Etc.



NEW YORK

F. M. BUCKLES & COMPANY
9 and 11 East Sixteenth Street

1903

SOUTH ST. PAUL
PUBLIC LIBRARY

COPYRIGHT, 1891,
BY
UNITED STATES BOOK COMPANY.

[*All rights reserved.*]

THE DOINGS OF RAFFLES HAW.

CHAPTER I

A DOUBLE ENIGMA.

"I'm afraid that he won't come," said Laura McIntyre, in a discontented voice.

"Why not?"

"Oh, look at the weather! It is something too awful." As she spoke a whirl of snow beat with a muffled patter against the cosey red-curtained window, while a long blast of wind shrieked and whistled through the branches of the great white-limbed elm which skirted the garden.

Robert McIntyre rose from the sketch upon which he had been working, and taking one of the lamps in his hand he peered out into the darkness. The long skeleton limbs of the bare trees tossed and quivered dimly amid the whirling drift. His sister sat by the fire, her fancy-work in her lap, and looked up at her brother's profile which showed against the brilliant light. It was a handsome face, young and fair and clear-cut, with wavy brown hair combed backward and rippling down into the outward curve at the ends which one associates with the artistic temperament. There was refinement too in his slightly puckered eyes, his dainty gold-rimmed pince-nez glasses, and in the black velvet coat which

caught the light so richly upon its shoulder. In his mouth only there was something, a suspicion of coarseness, a possibility of weakness, which in the eyes of some, and of his sister among them, marred the grace and beauty of his features. Yet, as he was wont himself to say, when one thinks that each poor mortal is heir to a legacy of every evil trait or bodily taint of so vast a line of ancestors, lucky indeed is the man who does not find that nature has scored up some long-owing family debt upon his features.

And indeed in this case the remorseless creditor had gone so far as to exact a claim from the lady also, though in her case the extreme beauty of the upper part of the face drew the eye away from any weakness which might be found in the lower. She was darker than her brother, so dark that her heavily-coiled hair seemed to be black until the light shone slantwise across it. The delicate half-petulant features, the finely traced brows, and the thoughtful humorous eyes were all perfect in their way, and yet the combination left something to be desired. There was a vague sense of a flaw somewhere in feature or in expression, which resolved itself, when analyzed, in a slight out-turning and droop of the lower lip, small indeed, and yet pronounced enough to turn what would have been a beautiful face into a merely pretty one. Very despondent and somewhat cross she looked as she leaned back in the arm-chair, a tangle of bright-colored silks and of drab holland upon her lap, her hands clasped behind her head, with her snowy forearms and little pink elbows projecting on either side.

"I know he won't come," she repeated.

"Nonsense, Laura! Of course he'll come. A sailor and afraid of the weather!"

“Ha!” She raised her finger and a smile of triumph played over her face, only to die away again into a blank look of disappointment. “It is only papa,” she murmured.

A shuffling step was heard in the hall, and a little peaky man, with his slippers very much down at the heel, came shambling into the room. Mr. McIntyre, senior, was pale and furtive-looking, with a thin straggling red beard shot with gray, and a sunken downcast face. Ill-fortune and ill-health had both left their marks upon him. Ten years before he had been one of the largest and richest gunmakers in Birmingham, but a long run of commercial bad luck had sapped his great fortune and had finally driven him into the bankruptcy court. The death of his wife on the very day of the declaration of his insolvency had filled his cup of sorrow, and he had gone about since with a stunned half-dazed expression upon his weak pallid face which spoke of a mind unhinged. So complete had been his downfall that the family would have been reduced to absolute poverty were it not for a small legacy of two hundred a year which both the children had received from one of their uncles upon the mother’s side, who had amassed a fortune in Australia. By combining their incomes, and by taking a house in the quiet country district of Tamfield, some fourteen miles from the great Midland City, they were still able to live with some approach to comfort. The change, however, was a bitter one to all; to Robert, who had to forego the luxuries dear to his artistic temperament, and to think of turning what had been merely an overruling hobby into a means of earning a living; and even more to Laura, who winced before the pity of her old friends, and found the lanes and fields of Tamfield intolerably

dull after the life and bustle of Edgbaston. Their discomfort was aggravated by the conduct of their father, whose life now was one long wail over his misfortunes, and who alternately sought comfort in the prayer-book and in the decanter for the ills which had befallen him.

To Laura, however, Tamfield presented one attraction which was now about to be taken from her. Their choice of the little country hamlet as their residence had been determined by the fact of their old friend, the Reverend John Spurling, having been nominated as the vicar. Hector Spurling, the elder son, two months Laura's senior, had been engaged to her for some years, and was indeed upon the point of marrying her when the sudden financial crash had disarranged their plans. A sub-lieutenant in the navy, he was home on leave at present, and hardly an evening passed without his making his way from the vicarage to Elmdene, where the McIntyres resided. To-day, however, a note had reached them to the effect that he had been suddenly ordered on duty and that he must rejoin his ship at Portsmouth by the next evening. He would look in, were it but for half an hour, to bid them adieu.

"Why, where's Hector?" asked Mr. McIntyre, blinking round from side to side.

"He's not come, father. How could you expect him to come on such a night as this! Why, there must be two feet of snow in the Glebe field."

"Not come, eh?" croaked the old man, throwing himself down upon the sofa. "Well, well, it only wants him and his father to throw us over and the thing will be complete."

"How can you even hint at such a thing, father?" cried Laura, indignantly. "They have been as true as steel. What would they think if they heard you!"

"I think, Robert," he said, disregarding his daughter's protest, "that I will have a drop, just the very smallest possible drop, of brandy. A mere thimbleful will do, but I rather think I have caught cold during the snowstorm to-day."

Robert went on sketching stolidly in his folding-book, but Laura looked up from her work. "I'm afraid that there is nothing in the house, father," she said.

"Laura! Laura!" He shook his head as one more in sorrow than in anger. "You are no longer a girl, Laura. You are a woman, the manager of a household, Laura. We trust in you. We look entirely toward you. And yet you leave your poor brother Robert without any brandy, to say nothing of me, your father. Good heavens, Laura, what would your mother have said! Think of accidents, think of sudden illness, think of apoplectic fits, Laura. It is a very grave res—a very grave respons—a very great risk that you run."

"I hardly touch the stuff," said Robert, curtly. "Laura need not provide any for me."

"As a medicine it is invaluable, Robert. To be used, you understand, and not to be abused. That's the whole secret of it. But I'll step down to the Three Pigeons for half an hour."

"My dear father," cried the young man, "you surely are not going out upon such a night! If you must have brandy, could I not send Sarah for some? Please let me send Sarah. Or I would go myself, or——"

Pip! came a little paper pellet from his sister's chair onto the sketch-book in front of him. He unrolled it and held it to the light. "For heaven's sake, let him go!" was scrawled across it.

"Well, in any case, wrap yourself up warm," he continued, laying bare his sudden change of front with a

masculine clumsiness which horrified his sister. "Perhaps it is not so cold as it looks. You can't lose your way, that is one blessing. And it is not more than a hundred yards."

With many mumbles and grumbles at his daughter's want of foresight, old McIntyre struggled into his great-coat and wrapped his scarf round his long thin throat. A sharp gust of cold wind made the lamps flicker as he threw open the hall door. His two children listened to the dull fall of his footsteps as he slowly picked out the winding garden path.

"He gets worse—he becomes intolerable," said Robert, at last. "We should not have let him out. He may make a public exhibition of himself."

"But it's Hector's last night," pleaded Laura. "It would be dreadful if they met, and he noticed anything. That was why I wished him to go."

"Then you were only just in time," remarked her brother, "for I hear the gate go, and—yes, you see."

As he spoke a cheery hail came from the outside, with a sharp rat-tat at the window. Robert stepped out and threw open the door to admit a tall young man whose black frieze jacket was all mottled and glittering with snow-crystals. Laughing loudly, he shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and kicked the snow from his boots before entering the little lamp-lit room.

Hector Spurling's profession was written in every line of his face. The clean-shaven lip and chin, the little fringe of side whisker, the straight decisive mouth, and the hard weather-tanned cheeks all spoke of the Royal Navy. Fifty such faces may be seen any night of the year round the mess-table of the Royal Naval College in Portsmouth Dockyard—faces which bear a closer resemblance to each other than brother does commonly to

brother. They are all cast in a common mould, the products of a system which teaches early self-reliance, hardihood, and manliness—a fine type upon the whole, less refined and less intellectual perhaps than their brothers of the land, but full of truth, and energy, and heroism. In figure he was straight, tall, and well knit, with keen gray eyes, and the sharp prompt manner of a man who has been accustomed both to command and to obey.

“You had my note?” he said, as he entered the room. “I have to go again, Laura. Isn’t it beastly? Old Smithers is short-handed and wants me back at once.” He sat down by the girl, and put his brown hand across her white one. “It won’t be a very large order this time,” he continued. “It’s the flying squadron business—Madeira, Gibraltar, Lisbon, and home. I shouldn’t wonder if we were back in March.”

“It seems only the other day that you landed,” she answered.

“Poor little girl! But it won’t be long. Mind you take good care of her, Robert, when I am gone. And when I come again, Laura, it will be the last time, mind! Hang the money! There are plenty who manage on less. We need not have a house. Why should we? You can get very nice rooms in Southsea at two pounds a week. McDougal, our paymaster, has just married, and he only gives thirty shillings. You would not be afraid, Laura?”

“No, indeed.”

“The dear old governor is so awfully cautious. Wait, wait, wait—that’s always his cry. I tell him that he ought to have been in the Government Heavy Ordnance Department. But I’ll speak to him to-night. I’ll talk him round. See if I don’t! And you must speak to your

own governor. Robert here will back you up. And here are the ports and the dates that we are due at each. Mind that you have a letter waiting for me at every one." He took a slip of paper from the side pocket of his coat, but instead of handing it to the young lady he remained staring at it with the utmost astonishment upon his face.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "Look here, Robert, what do you call this?"

"Hold it to the light! Why, it's a fifty-pound Bank of England note. Nothing remarkable about it that I can see."

"On the contrary, it's the queerest thing that ever happened to me. I can't make head or tail of it."

"Come then, Hector," cried Miss McIntyre, with a challenge in her eyes. "Something very queer happened to me also to-day. I'll bet a pair of gloves that my adventure was more out of the common than yours, though I have nothing so nice to show at the end of it."

"Come, I'll take that, and Robert here shall be the judge."

"State your cases." The young artist shut up his sketch-book and rested his head upon his hands with a face of mock solemnity. "Ladies first! Go along, Laura, though I think I know something of your adventure already."

"It was this morning, Hector," she said. "Oh, by the way, the story will make you wild. I had forgotten that. However, you mustn't mind, because really the poor fellow was perfectly mad."

"What on earth was it?" asked the young officer, his eyes travelling from the bank-note to his fiancée.

"Oh, it was harmless enough, and yet you will confess that it was very queer. I had gone out for a walk, but

as the snow began to fall I took shelter under the shed which the workmen have built at the near end of the great new house. The men have gone, you know, and the owner is supposed to be coming to-morrow, but the shed is still standing. I was sitting there upon a packing-case when a man came down the road and stopped under the same shelter. He was a quiet, pale-faced man, very tall and thin, not much more than thirty I should think, poorly dressed, but with the look and bearing of a gentleman. He asked me one or two questions about the village and the people, which, of course, I answered, until at last we found ourselves chatting away in the pleasantest and easiest fashion over all sorts of things. The time passed so quickly that I forgot all about the snow until he drew my attention to its having stopped for the moment. Then, just as I was turning to go, what in the world do you suppose that he did? He took a step toward me, looked in a sad, pensive way into my face, and said: 'I wonder whether you could care for me if I were without a penny.' Wasn't it strange? I was so frightened that I whisked out of the shed and was off down the road before he could add another word. But really, Hector, you need not look so black, for when I look back at it I can quite see from his tone and manner that he meant no harm. He was thinking aloud without the least intention of being offensive. I am convinced that the poor fellow was mad."

"Hum! There was some method in his madness, it seems to me," remarked her brother.

"There would have been some method in my kicking," said the lieutenant, savagely. "I never heard of a more outrageous thing in my life."

"Now I said that you would be wild." She laid her white hand upon the sleeve of his rough frieze jacket.

"It was nothing. I shall never see the poor fellow again. He was evidently a stranger to this part of the country. But that was my little adventure. Now let us have yours."

The young man crackled the bank-note between his finger and thumb while he passed his other hand over his hair with the action of a man who strives to collect himself.

"It is some ridiculous mistake," he said ; "I must try and set it right. Yet I don't know how to set about it either. I was going down to the village from the vicarage just after dusk when I found a fellow in a trap who had got himself into broken water. One wheel had sunk into the edge of the ditch, which had been hidden by the snow, and the whole thing was high and dry, with a list to starboard enough to slide him out of his seat. I lent a hand, of course, and soon had the wheel in the road again. It was quite dark, and I fancy that the fellow thought that I was a bumpkin, for we did not exchange five words. As he drove off he shoved this into my hand. It is the merest chance that I did not chuck it away, for, feeling that it was a crumpled piece of paper, I imagined that it must be a tradesman's advertisement or something of the kind. However, as luck would have it, I put it in my pocket, and there I found it when I looked for the dates of our cruise. Now you know as much of the matter as I do."

Brother and sister stared at the black and white crinkled note, with astonishment upon their faces.

"Why, your unknown traveller must have been Monte Christo, or Rothschild at the least," said Robert. "I am bound to say, Laura, that I think that you have lost your bet."

"Oh, I am quite content to lose it. I never heard of

such a piece of luck. What a perfectly delightful man this must be to know."

"But I can't take his money," said Hector Spurling, looking somewhat ruefully at the note. "A little prize-money is all very well in its way, but a Johnny must draw the line somewhere. Besides, it must have been a mistake. And yet he meant to give me something big, for he could not mistake a note for a coin. I suppose I must advertise for the fellow."

"It seems a pity too," remarked Robert. "I must say that I don't quite see it in the same light that you do."

"Indeed I think that you are very Quixotic, Hector," said Laura McIntyre. "Why should you not accept it in the spirit in which it was meant. You did this stranger a service—perhaps a greater service than you know of—and he meant this as a little memento of the occasion. I do not see that there is any possible reason against your keeping it."

"Oh, come!" said the young sailor, with an embarrassed laugh. "It is not quite the thing—not the sort of story one would care to tell at mess."

"In any case, you are off to-morrow morning," observed Robert. "You have no time to make inquiries about the mysterious Croesus. You must really make the best of it."

"Well, look here, Laura, you put it in your work-basket," cried Hector Spurling. "You shall be my banker. And if the rightful owner turns up then I can refer him to you. If not, I suppose we must look on it as a kind of salvage money, though I am bound to say I don't feel entirely comfortable about it." He rose to his feet, and threw the note down into the brown basket of colored wools that stood beside her. "Now, Laura, I must up anchor, for I promised the governor to be

back by nine. It won't be long this time, dear, and it shall be the last. Good-by, Robert! Good luck!"

"Good-by, Hector! Bon voyage!" The young artist remained by the table, while his sister followed her lover to the door. In the dim light of the hall he could see their figures and overhear their words.

"Next time, little girl."

"Next time be it, Hector."

"And nothing can part us?"

"Nothing."

"In this whole world?"

"Nothing."

Robert discreetly closed the door. A moment later a thud from without, and the quick footsteps crunching on the snow told him that their visitor had departed.

CHAPTER II.

THE TENANT OF THE NEW HALL.

The snow had ceased to fall, but for a week a hard frost had held the country-side in its iron grip. The roads rang under the horses' hoofs, and every wayside ditch and runlet was a sheet of ice. Over the long undulating landscape the red-brick houses peeped out warmly against spotless background, and the lines of gray smoke streamed straight up into the windless air. The sky was of the lightest pale blue, and the morning sun, shining through the distant fog-wreaths of Birmingham, struck a subdued glow from the broad-spread snow-fields which might have gladdened the eyes of an artist.

It did gladden the heart of one who viewed it that morning from the summit of the gently-curving Tamfield Hill. Robert McIntyre stood with his elbows upon a gate-rail, his Tam-o'-Shanter hat over his eyes, and a short briar-root pipe in his mouth, looking slowly about him with the absorbed air of one who breathes his full of nature. Beneath him to the north lay the village of Tamfield, red walls, gray roofs, and a scattered bristle of dark trees, with his own little Elmdene nestling back from the broad white winding Birmingham road. At the other side, as he slowly faced round, lay a vast stone building, white and clear-cut, fresh from the builder's hands. A great tower shot up from one corner of it, and a hundred windows twinkled ruddily in the

light of the morning sun. A little distance from it stood a second small square low-lying structure, with a tall chimney rising from the midst of it, rolling out a long plume of smoke into the frosty air. The whole vast structure stood within its own grounds enclosed by a stately park wall and surrounded by what would in time be an extensive plantation of fir-trees. By the lodge-gates a vast pile of *débris*, with lines of sheds for workmen, and huge heaps of planks from scaffoldings, all proclaimed that the work had only just been brought to an end.

Robert McIntyre looked down with curious eyes at the broad-spread building. It had long been a mystery and a subject of gossip for the whole country-side. Hardly a year had elapsed since the rumor had first gone about that a millionaire had bought a tract of land, and that it was his intention to build a country-seat upon it. Since then the work had been pushed on night and day, until now it was finished to the last detail in a shorter time than it takes to build many a six-roomed cottage. Every morning two long special trains had arrived from Birmingham, carrying down a great army of laborers, who were relieved in the evening by a fresh gang, who carried on their task under the rays of twelve enormous electric lights. The number of workmen appeared to be only limited by the space into which they could be fitted. Great lines of wagons conveyed the white Portland stone from the depot by the station. Hundreds of busy toilers handed it over, shaped and squared, to the actual masons, who swung it up with steam cranes onto the growing walls, where it was instantly fitted and mortared by their companions. Day by day the house shot higher, while pillar and cornice and carving seemed to bud out from it as if by magic. Nor was the work confined to the main building. A

large separate structure sprang up at the same time, and there came gangs of pale-faced men from London with much extraordinary machinery, vast cylinders, wheels, and wires, which they fitted up in this outlying building. The great chimney which rose from the centre of it, combined with these strange furnishings, seemed to mean that it was reserved as a factory or place of business, for it was rumored that this rich man's hobby was the same as a poor man's necessity, and that he was fond of working with his own hands amid chemicals and furnaces. Scarce, too, was the second story begun ere the wood-workers and plumbers and furnishers were busy beneath, carrying out a thousand strange and costly schemes for the greater comfort and convenience of the owner. Singular stories were told all round the country, and even in Birmingham itself, of the extraordinary luxury, and the absolute disregard for money, which marked all these arrangements. No sum appeared to be too great to spend upon the smallest detail which might do away with or lessen any of the petty inconveniences of life. Wagons and wagons of the richest furniture had passed through the village between lines of staring villagers. Costly skins, glossy carpets, rich rugs, ivory and ebony, and metal, every glimpse into these storehouses of treasure, had given rise to some new legend. And finally, when all had been arranged, there had come a staff of forty servants who heralded the approach of the owner, Mr. Raffles Haw, himself.

It was no wonder, then, that it was with considerable curiosity that Robert McIntyre looked down at the great house, and marked the smoking chimneys, the curtained windows, and the other signs which showed that its tenant had arrived. A vast area of green-houses

gleamed like a lake on the further side, and beyond were the long lines of stables and out-houses. Fifty horses had passed through Tamfield the week before, so that large as were the preparations, they were not more than would be needed. Who and what could this man be, who spent his money with so lavish a hand? His name was unknown. Birmingham was as ignorant as Tamfield as to his origin, or the sources of his wealth. Robert McIntyre brooded languidly over the problem as he leaned against the gate, puffing his blue clouds of bird's-eye into the crisp still air.

Suddenly his eye caught a dark figure emerging from the avenue gates and striding up the winding road. A few minutes brought him near enough to show a familiar face looking over the stiff collar and from under the soft black hat of an English clergyman.

"Good-morning, Mr. Spurling."

"Ah, good-morning, Robert. How are you? Are you coming my way? How slippery the roads are." His round kindly face was beaming with good-nature, and he took little jumps as he walked, like a man who can hardly contain himself for pleasure.

"Have you heard from Hector?"

"Oh, yes. He went off all right last Wednesday from Spithead, and he will write from Madeira. But you generally have later news at Elmdene than I have."

"I don't know whether Laura has heard. Have you been up to see this new-comer?"

"Yes, I have just left him."

"Is he a married man—this Mr. Raffles Haw?"

"No, he is a bachelor. He does not seem to have any relations either, as far as I could learn. He lives alone, amid his huge staff of servants. It is a most re-

markable establishment. It made me think of the 'Arabian Nights.' "

"And the man? What is he like?"

"He is an angel—a positive angel. I never heard or read of such kindness in my life. He has made me a happy man." The clergyman's eyes sparkled with emotion, and he blew his nose loudly in his big red handkerchief.

Robert McIntyre looked at him in surprise. "I am delighted to hear it," he said. "May I ask what he has done?"

"I went up to him by appointment this morning. I had written, asking him if I might call. I spoke to him of the parish and its needs, of my long struggle to restore the south side of the church, and of our efforts to help my poor parishioners during this hard weather. While I spoke he said not a word, but sat with a vacant face as though he were not listening to me. When I had finished, he took up his pen. 'How much will it take to do the church?' he asked. 'A thousand pounds,' I answered, 'but we have already raised three hundred among ourselves. The Squire has very handsomely given fifty pounds.' "

" 'Well,' said he, 'how about the poor folk? How many families are there?' 'About three hundred,' I answered. 'And coals, I believe, are at about a pound a ton,' said he. 'Three tons ought to see them through the rest of the winter. Then you can get a very fair pair of blankets for two pounds. That would make five pounds per family, and seven hundred for the church.' He dipped his pen in the ink, and as I am a living man, Robert, he wrote me a check then and there for two thousand two hundred pounds. I don't know what I said. I felt like a fool. I could not stammer out words

with which to thank him. All my troubles have been taken from my shoulders in an instant, and indeed, Robert, I can hardly realize it."

"He must be a most charitable man."

"Extraordinarily so. And so unpretending. One would think that it was I who was doing the favor, and he who was the beggar. I thought of that passage about making the heart of the widow sing for joy. He made my heart sing for joy, I can tell you. Are you coming up to the Vicarage?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Spurling. I must go home and get to work on my new picture. It's a five-foot canvas—'The Landing of the Romans in Kent.' I must have another try for the Academy. Good-morning." He raised his hat and continued down the road, while the vicar turned off into the path which led to his home.

Robert McIntyre had converted a large bare room in the upper story of Elmdene into a studio, and thither he retreated after lunch. It was as well that he should have some little den of his own, for his father would talk of little save his lodgers and accounts, while Laura had become somewhat peevish and querulous since the one tie which held her to Tamfield had been removed. The chamber was a bare and bleak one, unpapered and uncarpeted, but a good fire sparkled in the grate, and two large windows gave him the needful light. His easel stood in the centre with the great canvas balanced across it, while against the walls there leaned his two last attempts, "The Murder of Thomas of Canterbury" and "The Signing of Magna Charta." Robert had a weakness for large subjects and broad effects. If his ambition was greater than his skill, he had still all the love of his art and the patience under discouragement, which are the stuff out of which successful painters are made.

Twice his brace of pictures had journeyed to town, and twice they had come back to him, until the finely gilded frames which had made such a call upon his purse began to show signs of these varied adventures. Yet in spite of their depressing company Robert turned to his fresh work with all the enthusiasm which a conviction of ultimate success can inspire.

But he could not work that afternoon. In vain he dashed in his background and outlined the long curves of the Roman galleys. Do what he would his mind would still wander from his work to dwell upon his conversation with the vicar in the morning. His imagination was fascinated by the idea of this strange man living alone amid a crowd and yet wielding such a power that with one dash of his pen he could change sorrow into joy and transform the condition of a whole parish. The incident of the fifty-pound note came back to his mind. It must surely have been Raffles Haw with whom Hector Spurling had come in contact. There could not be two men in one parish to whom so large a sum was of so small an account as to be thrown to a bystander in return for a trifling piece of assistance. Of course it must have been Raffles Haw. And his sister had the note with instructions to return it to the owner, could he be found. He threw aside his palette, and descending into the sitting-room, he told Laura and his father of his morning's interview with the vicar, and of his conviction that this was the man of whom Hector was in quest.

"Tut, tut," said old McIntyre. "How is this, Laura? I knew nothing of this. What do women know of money or of business. Hand the note over to me and I shall relieve you of all responsibility. I will take everything upon myself."

"I cannot possibly, papa," said Laura, with decision. "I should not think of parting with it."

"What is the world coming to!" cried the old man, with his thin hands held up in protest. "You grow more undutiful every day, Laura. This money would be of use to me—of use, you understand. It may be the corner-stone of the vast business which I shall reconstruct. I will use it, Laura, and I will pay something—four, shall we say, or even four and a half—and you may have it back on any day. And I will give security—the security of my—well, of my word of honor."

"It is quite impossible, papa," his daughter answered, coldly. "It is not my money. Hector asked me to be his banker. Those were his very words. It is not in my power to lend it. As to what you say, Robert, you may be right or you may be wrong, but I certainly shall not give Mr. Raffles Haw or anyone else the money without Hector's express command."

"You are very right about not giving it to Mr. Raffles Haw," cried old McIntyre, with many nods of approbation. "I should certainly not let it go out of the family."

"Well, I thought that I would tell you." Robert picked up his Tam-o'-Shanter and strolled out to avoid the discussion between his father and sister, which he saw was about to be renewed. His artistic nature revolted from these petty and sordid disputes, and he turned to the crisp air and the broad landscape to soothe his ruffled feelings. Avarice had no place among his failings, and his father's perpetual chatter about money inspired him with a positive loathing and disgust for the subject.

Robert was lounging slowly along his favorite walk, which curled over the hill, with his mind turning from the Roman invasion to the mysterious millionaire, when

his eyes fell upon a tall lean man in front of him who, with a pipe between his lips, was endeavoring to light a match under cover of his cap. The man was clad in a rough pea-jacket and bore traces of smoke and grime upon his face and hands. Yet there is a freemasonry among smokers which overrides every social difference, so Robert stopped and held out his case of fusees.

"A light?" said he.

"Thank you." The man picked out a fusee, struck it, and bent his head to it. He had a pale thin face, a short straggling beard, and a very sharp and curving nose, with decision and character in the straight thick eyebrows which almost met on either side of it. Clearly a superior kind of workman, and possibly one of those who had been employed in the construction of the new house. Here was a chance of getting some first-hand information on the question which had aroused his curiosity. Robert waited until he had lit his pipe and then walked on beside him.

"Are you going in the direction of the new hall?" he asked.

"Yes." The man's voice was cold and his manner reserved.

"Perhaps you were engaged in the building of it?"

"Yes, I had a hand in it."

"They say that it is a wonderful place inside. It has been quite the talk of the district. Is it as rich as they say?"

"I am sure I don't know. I have not heard what they say."

His attitude was certainly not encouraging, and it seemed to Robert that he gave little sidelong suspicious glances at him out of his keen gray eyes. Yet if he were so careful and discreet there was the more reason

to think that there was information to be extracted, if he could but find a way to it.

"Ah, there it lies," he remarked, as they topped the brow of the hill, and looked down once more at the great building.

"Well, no doubt it is very gorgeous and splendid, but really, for my own part, I would rather live in my own little box down yonder in the village."

The workman puffed gravely at his pipe. "You are no great admirer of wealth then?" he said.

"Not I. I should not care to be a penny richer than I am. Of course, I should like to sell my pictures. One must make a living. But beyond that I ask for nothing. I daresay that I, a poor artist, or you, a man who works for your bread, have more happiness out of life than the owner of that great palace."

"Indeed, I think that it is more than likely," the other answered, in a much more conciliatory voice.

"Art," said Robert, warming to the subject, "is her own reward. What mere bodily indulgence is there to be bought by money which can give that deep thrill of satisfaction which comes on the man who has conceived something new, something beautiful, and the daily delight as he sees it grow under his hand, until it stands before him a completed whole? With my art and without wealth I am happy. Without my art I should have a void which no money could fill. But I really don't know why I should say all this to you."

The workman had stopped and was staring at him earnestly, with a look of the deepest interest upon his smoke-darkened features.

"I am very glad to hear what you say," said he. "It is a pleasure to know that the worship of gold is not quite universal, and that there are at least some who can

rise above it. Would you mind my shaking you by the hand ? ”

It was a somewhat extraordinary request, but Robert rather prided himself upon his Bohemianism, and upon his happy faculty for making friends with all sorts and conditions of men. He readily exchanged a cordial grip with his chance acquaintance.

“ You expressed some curiosity as to this house. I know the grounds pretty well and might perhaps show you one or two little things which would interest you. Here are the gates. Will you come in with me ? ”

Here was indeed a chance. Robert eagerly assented and walked up the winding drive amid the growing fir-trees. When he found his uncouth guide however marching straight across the broad gravel square to the main entrance he felt that he had placed himself in a false position. “ Surely not through the front door ! ” he whispered, plucking his companion by the sleeve. “ Perhaps Mr. Raffles Haw might not like it.”

“ I don’t think there will be any difficulty,” said the other, with a quiet smile. “ My name is Raffles Haw.”

CHAPTER III.

A HOUSE OF WONDERS.

Robert McIntyre's face must have expressed the utter astonishment which filled his mind at this most unlooked-for announcement. For a moment he thought that his companion must be joking, but the ease and assurance with which he lounged up the steps, and the deep respect with which a richly clad functionary in the hall swung open the door to admit him, showed that he spoke in sober earnest. Raffles Haw glanced back, and seeing the look of absolute amazement upon the young artist's features, he chuckled quietly to himself.

"You will forgive me, won't you, for not disclosing my identity," he said, laying his hand with a friendly gesture upon the other's sleeve. "Had you known me you would have spoken less freely and I should not have had the opportunity of learning your true worth. For example, you might hardly have been so frank upon the matter of wealth had you known that you were speaking to the master of the hall."

"I don't think that I was ever so astonished in my life," gasped Robert.

"Naturally you are. How could you take me for anything but a workman. So I am. Chemistry is one of my hobbies, and I spend hours a day in my laboratory yonder. I have only just struck work, and as I had inhaled some not over pleasant gases, I thought that a turn down the road and a whiff of tobacco might do me

good. That was how I came to meet you, and my toilet, I fear, corresponded only too well with my smoke-be-grimed face. But I rather fancy I know you by repute. Your name is Robert McIntyre, is it not?"

"Yes, though I cannot imagine how you knew."

"Well, I naturally took some little trouble to learn something of my neighbors. I had heard that there was an artist of that name, and I presume that artists are not very numerous in Tamfield. But how do you like the design? I hope it does not offend your trained taste."

"Indeed it is wonderful, marvellous. You must yourself have an extraordinary eye for an effect."

"Oh, I have no taste at all—not the slightest. I cannot tell good from bad. There was never such a complete Philistine. But I had the best man in London down, and another fellow from Vienna. They fixed it up between them."

They had been standing just within the folding-doors upon a huge mat of bison skins. In front of them lay a great square court, paved with many-colored marbles, laid out in a labyrinth of arabesque design. In the centre a fountain of carved jade shot five high thin feathers of spray into the air, four of which curved toward each corner of the court, to descend into broad marble basins, while the fifth mounted straight up to an immense height, and then tinkled back into the central reservoir. On either side of the court a tall graceful palm-tree shot up its slender stem to break into a crown of drooping green leaves some fifty feet above their heads. All round were a series of Moorish arches, in jade and serpentine marble, with heavy curtains of the deepest purple to cover the doors which lay between them. In front, to right and left, a broad staircase of marble, carpeted with rich thick Smyrna rug-work, led to the

upper stories, which were arranged around the central court. The temperature within was warm and yet fresh, like the air of an English May.

"It's taken from the Alhambra," said Raffles Haw. "The palm-trees are pretty. They strike right through the building into the ground beneath, and their roots are all girt round with hot-water pipes. They seem to thrive very well."

"What beautifully delicate brass-work!" cried Robert, looking up, with admiring eyes, at the bright and infinitely fragile metal trellis screens which adorned the spaces between the Moorish arches.

"It is rather neat. But it is not brass-work. Brass is not tough enough to allow them to work it to that degree of fineness. It is gold. But just come this way with me. You won't mind waiting while I remove this smoke."

He led the way to a door upon the left side of the court, which, to Robert's surprise, swung slowly open as they approached it.

"That is a little improvement which I have adopted," remarked the master of the house. "As you go up to a door your weight upon the planks releases a spring which causes the hinges to revolve. Pray step in. This is my own little sanctum, and furnished after my own heart."

If Robert expected to see some fresh exhibition of wealth and luxury he was wofully disappointed, for he found himself in a large but bare room, with a little iron truckle bed in one corner, a few scattered wooden chairs, a dingy carpet, and a large table heaped with books, bottles, papers, and all the other débris which collect around a busy and untidy man. Motioning his visitor into a chair, Raffles Haw pulled off his coat, and turning

up the sleeves of his coarse flannel shirt, he began to plunge and scrub in the warm water which flowed from a tap in the wall.

"You see how simple my own tastes are," he remarked, as he mopped his dripping face and hair with a towel. "This is the only room in my great house where I find myself in a congenial atmosphere. It is homely to me. I can read here and smoke my pipe in peace. Anything like luxury is abhorrent to me."

"Really, I should not have thought it," observed Robert.

"It is a fact, I assure you. You see, even with your views as to worthlessness of wealth, views which, I am sure, are very sensible and much to your credit, you must allow that if a man should happen to be the possessor of vast—well, let us say of considerable—sums of money, it is his duty to get that money into circulation, so that the community may be the better for it. There is the secret of my fine feathers. I have to exert all my ingenuity in order to spend my income and yet keep the money in legitimate channels. For example, it is very easy to give money away, and no doubt I could dispose of my surplus, or part of my surplus, in that fashion, but I have no wish to pauperize anyone, or to do mischief by indiscriminate charity. I must exact some sort of money's worth for all the money which I lay out. You see my point, don't you?"

"Entirely, though really it is something novel to hear a man complain of the difficulty of spending his income."

"I assure you that it is a very serious difficulty with me. But I have hit upon some plans—some very pretty plans. Will you wash your hands? Well, then, perhaps you would care to have a look round? Just

come into this corner of the room and sit upon this chair—so. Now I will sit upon this one, and we are ready to start.”

The angle of the chamber in which they sat was painted for about six feet in each direction of a dark chocolate brown, and was furnished with two red plush seats protruding from the walls, and in striking contrast with the simplicity of the rest of the apartment.

“This,” remarked Raffles Haw, “is a lift, though it is so closely joined to the rest of the room that without the change in color it might puzzle you to find the division. It is made to run either horizontally or vertically. This line of knobs represent the various rooms. You can see ‘dining,’ ‘smoking,’ ‘billiard,’ ‘library,’ and so on upon them. I will show you the upward action. I press this one with ‘kitchen’ upon it.”

There was a sense of motion, a very slight jar, and Robert, without moving from his seat, was conscious that the room had vanished, and that a large arched oaken door stood in the place which it had occupied.

“That is the kitchen door,” said Raffles Haw. “I have ~~my~~ kitchens at the top of the house. I cannot tolerate the smell of cooking. We have come up eighty feet in one and a half seconds. Now I ~~press~~ again and here we are in my room once more.”

Robert McIntyre stared about him in astonishment. “The wonders of science are greater than those of magic,” he remarked.

“Yes, it is a pretty little mechanism. Now we try the horizontal. I press the ‘dining’ knob and here we are, you see. Step toward the door, and you will find it open in front of you.”

Robert did as he was bid, and found himself with his companion in a large and lofty room, while the lift,

the instant that it was freed from their weight, flashed back to its original position. With his feet sinking into the soft rich carpet, as though he were ankle-deep in some mossy bank, he stared about him at the great pictures which lined the walls.

"Surely, surely, I see Raphael's touch there," he cried, pointing up at the one which faced him.

"Yes, it is a Raphael, and I believe one of his best. I had a very exciting bid for it with the French Government. They wanted it for the Louvre, but of course at an auction the longest purse must win."

"And this 'Arrest of Catiline' must be a Rubens. One cannot mistake his splendid men and his infamous women."

"Yes, it is a Rubens. The other two are a Velasquez and a Teniers, fair specimens of the Spanish and of the Dutch schools. I have only old masters here. The moderns are in the billiard-room. The furniture here is a little curious—in fact, I fancy that it is unique. It is made of ebony and narwhal's horns. You see that the legs of everything are of spiral ivory, both the table and the chairs. It cost the upholsterer some little pains, for the supply of these things is a strictly limited one. Curiously enough, the Chinese Emperor had given a large order for narwhal's horns to repair some ancient pagoda which was fenced in with them, but I outbid him in the market, and his Celestial highness has had to wait. There is a lift here in the corner, but we do not need it. Pray step through this door. This is the billiard-room," he continued, as they advanced into the adjoining room. "You see I have a few recent pictures of merit upon the walls. Here is a Corot, two Meissonniers, a Bouguereau, a Millais, an Orchardson, and two Alma Tademas. It seems to me to be a

pity to hang pictures over these walls of carved oak. Look at those birds hopping and singing in the branches. They really seem to move and twitter, don't they?"

"They are perfect. I never saw such exquisite work. But why do you call it a billiard-room, Mr. Haw? I do not see any board."

"Oh, a board is such a clumsy, uncompromising piece of furniture. It is always in the way, unless you actually need to use it. In this case the board is covered by that square of polished maple which you see let into the floor. Now I put my foot upon this motor. You see!" As he spoke the central portion of the flooring flew up, and a most beautiful tortoise-shell-plated billiard-table rose up some four feet into the air. He pressed a second spring and a bagatelle-table appeared in the same fashion. "You may have card-tables or what you will by setting the levers in motion," he remarked. "But all this is very trifling. Perhaps we may find something in the museum which may be of more interest to you."

He led the way into another chamber, which was furnished in antique style, with hangings of the rarest and richest tapestry. The floor was a mosaic of colored marbles, scattered over with mats of costly fur. There was little furniture, but a number of Louis-quatorze cabinets of ebony and silver, with delicately painted plaques, were ranged round the apartment.

"It is perhaps hardly fair to dignify it by the name of a museum," said Raffles Haw. "It consists merely of a few elegant trifles which I have picked up here and there. Gems are my strongest point. Ifancy that there—perhaps I might challenge comparison with any private collector in the world. I lock them up, for even

the best servants may be tempted." He took a silver key from his watch-chain and began to unlock and draw out the drawers. A cry of wonder and of admiration burst from Robert McIntyre, as his eyes rested upon case after case filled with the most magnificent stones. The deep still red of the rubies, the clear scintillating green of the emeralds, the hard glitter of the diamonds, the many shifting shades of beryls, of amethysts, of onyxes, of cats'-eyes, of opals, of agates, of cornelians, seemed to fill the whole chamber with a vague twinkling of many-colored lights. Long slabs of the beautiful blue lapis lazuli, magnificent bloodstones, specimens of pink and red and white coral, long strips of lustrous pearls, all these were tossed out by their owner as a careless schoolboy might pour marbles from his bag.

"This isn't bad," he said, holding up a great glowing yellow mass as large as his own head. "It is really a very fine piece of amber. It was forwarded to me by my agent at the Baltic. Twenty-eight pounds it weighs. I never heard of so fine a one. I have no very large brilliants—there were no very large ones in the market—but my average is good. Pretty toys, are they not?" He picked up a large double handful of emeralds from a drawer, and then let them trickle slowly back into the heap.

"Good heavens!" cried Robert, as he gazed from case to case. "It is an immense fortune in itself. Surely a hundred thousand pounds would hardly buy so splendid a collection."

"I don't think that you would do for a valuer of precious stones," said Raffles Haw, laughing. "Why, the contents of that one little drawer of brilliants could not be bought for the sum which you name. I have a memo. here of what I have expended up to date on my

collection, though I have agents at work who will probably make very considerable additions to it within the next few weeks. As matters stand, however, I have spent—let me see—pearls, one forty thousand; emeralds, seven fifty; rubies, eight forty; brilliants, nine twenty; onyxes—I have several very nice onyxes—two thirty. Other gems, carbuncles, agates—hum! Yes, it figures out at just over four million seven hundred and forty thousand. I daresay that we may say five million, for I have not counted the odd money.”

“Good gracious!” cried the young artist, with staring eyes.

“I have a certain feeling of duty in the matter. You see the cutting, polishing, and general sale of stones is one of those industries which is entirely dependent upon wealth. If we do not support it it must languish, which means misfortune to a considerable number of people. The same applies to the gold filigree-work which you noticed in the court. Wealth has its responsibilities, and the encouragement of these handicrafts are among the most obvious of them. Here is a nice ruby. It is Burmese, and the fifth largest in existence. I am inclined to think that if it were uncut it would be the second, but of course cutting takes away a great deal.” He held up the blazing red stone, about the size of a chestnut, between his finger and thumb for a moment, and then threw it carelessly back into its drawer. “Come into the smoking-room,” he said. “You will need some little refreshment, for they say that sight-seeing is the most exhausting occupation in the world.”

CHAPTER IV.

FROM CLIME TO CLIME.

The chamber in which the bewildered Robert now found himself was more luxurious, if less rich, than any which he had yet seen. Low settees of claret-colored plush were scattered in orderly disorder over a mossy Eastern carpet. Deep lounges, reclining sofas, American rocking-chairs—all were to be had for the choosing. One end of the room was walled by glass, and appeared to open upon a luxuriant hot-house. At the further end a double line of gilt rails supported a profusion of the most recent magazines and periodicals. A rack at each side of the inlaid fireplace sustained a long line of the pipes of all places and nations—English cherrywoods, French briers, German china-bowls, carved meerschauins, scented cedar and myall wood, with Eastern narghiles, Turkish chibouks, and two great golden-topped hookahs. To right and left were a series of small lockers, extending in a treble row for the whole length of the room, with the names of the various brands of tobacco scrolled in ivory-work across them. Above were other larger tiers of polished oak, which held cigars and cigarettes.

“Try that Damascus settee,” said the master of the house, as he threw himself into a rocking-chair. “It is from the Sultan’s upholsterer. The Turks have a very good notion of comfort. I am a confirmed smoker myself, Mr. McIntyre, so I have been able perhaps to

check my architect here more than in most of the other departments. Of pictures, for example, I know nothing, as you would very speedily find out. On a tobacco I might perhaps offer an opinion. Now these"—he drew out some long beautifully rolled mellow-colored cigars—"these are really something a little out of the common. Do try one."

Robert lit the weed which was offered to him and leaned back luxuriously amid his cushions, gazing through the blue balmy fragrant cloud-wreaths at the extraordinary man in the dirty pea-jacket, who spoke of millions as another might of sovereigns. With his pale face, his sad, languid air, and his bowed shoulders, it was as though he were crushed down under the weight of his own gold. There was a mute apology, an attitude of deprecation, in his whole manner and speech, which was strangely at variance with the immense power which he wielded. To Robert the whole whimsical incident had been intensely interesting and amusing. His artistic nature blossomed out in this atmosphere of perfect luxury and comfort, and he was conscious of a sense of repose and of absolute sensual contentment such as he had never before experienced.

"Shall it be coffee, or Rhine wine, or Tokay, or perhaps something stronger?" asked Raffles Haw, stretching out his hand to what looked like a piano-board projecting from the wall. "I can recommend the Tokay. I have it from the man who supplies the Emperor of Austria, though I think I may say that I get the cream of it." He struck twice upon one of the piano-notes and sat expectant. With a sharp click at the end of ten seconds a sliding shutter flew open and a small tray protruded bearing two long tapering Venetian glasses filled with wine.

"It works very nicely," said Raffles Haw. "It is quite a new thing—never before done, as far as I know. You see the names of the various wines and so on are printed on the notes. By pressing the note down I complete an electric circuit which causes the tap in the cellars beneath to remain open long enough to fill the glass which always stands beneath it. The glasses, you understand, stand upon a revolving drum, so that there must always be one there. The glasses are then brought up through a pneumatic tube, which is set working by the increased weight of the glass when the wine is added to it. It is a pretty little idea. But I am afraid that I bore you rather with all these petty contrivances. It is a whim of mine to push mechanism as far as it will go."

"On the contrary, I am filled with interest and wonder," said Robert, warmly. "It is as if I had been suddenly whipped up out of prosaic old England and transferred in an instant to some enchanted palace, some Eastern home of the Genii. I could not have believed that there existed upon this earth such adaptation of means to an end, such complete mastery of every detail which may aid in stripping life of any of its petty worries."

"I have something yet to show you," remarked Raffles Haw. "But we will rest here for a few minutes, for I wish to have a word with you. How is the cigar?"

"Most excellent."

"It was rolled in Louisiana in the old slavery days. There is nothing made like them now. The man who had them did not know their value. He let them go at merely a few shillings apiece. Now I want you to do me a favor, Mr. McIntyre."

"I shall be so glad."

"You can see more or less how I am situated. I am a complete stranger here. With the well-to-do classes I

have little in common. I am no society man. I don't want to call or be called on. I am a student in a small way, and a man of quiet tastes. I have no social ambitions at all. Do you understand?"

"Entirely."

"On the other hand, my experience of the world has been that it is the rarest thing to be able to form a friendship with a poorer man—I mean with a man who is at all eager to increase his income. They think much of your wealth and little of yourself. I have tried, you understand, and I know." He paused and ran his fingers through his thin beard. Robert McIntyre nodded to show that he appreciated his position.

"Now, you see," he continued, "if I am to be cut off from the rich by my own tastes, and from those who are not rich by my distrust of their motives, my situation is an isolated one. Not that I mind isolation; I am used to it. But it limits my field of usefulness. I have no trustworthy means of informing myself when and where I may do good. I have already, I am glad to say, met a man to-day, your vicar, who appears to be thoroughly unselfish and trustworthy. He shall be one of my channels of communication with the outer world. Might I ask you whether you would be willing to become another?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Robert, eagerly. The proposition filled his heart with joy, for it seemed to give him an almost official connection with this paradise of a house. He could not have asked for anything more to his taste.

"I was fortunate enough to discover by your conversation how high a ground you take in such matters, and how entirely disinterested you are. You may have observed that I was short and almost rude with you at

first. I have had reason to fear and suspect all chance friendships. Too often they have proved to be carefully planned beforehand, with some sordid object in view. Good heavens, what stories I could tell you! A lady pursued by a bull—I have risked my life to save her, and have learned afterward that the scene had been arranged by the mother as an effective introduction, and that the bull had been hired by the hour. But I won't shake your faith in human nature. I have had some rude shocks myself. I look perhaps with a jaundiced eye on all who come near me. It is the more needful that I should have one whom I can trust to advise me."

"If you will only show me where my opinion can be of any use I shall be most happy," said Robert. "My people come from Birmingham, but I know most of the folk here and their position."

"That is just what I want. Money can do so much good, and it may do so much harm. I shall consult you when I am in doubt. By the way, there is one small question which I might ask you now. Can you tell me who a young lady is with very dark hair, gray eyes, and a finely chiselled face. She wore a blue dress when I saw her, with astrakhan about her neck and cuffs?"

Robert chuckled to himself. "I know that dress pretty well," he said. "It is my sister Laura whom you describe."

"Your sister! Really! Why, there is a resemblance, now that my attention is called to it. I saw her the other day, and wondered who she might be. She lives with you, of course?"

"Yes. My father, she, and I live together at Elm-dene."

"Where I hope to have the pleasure of making their

acquaintance. You have finished your cigar? Have another, or try a pipe. To the real smoker all is mere trifling save the pipe. I have most brands of tobacco here. The lockers are filled on the Monday, and on Saturday they are handed over to the old folk at the alms-houses, so I manage to keep it pretty fresh always. Well, if you won't take anything else, perhaps you would care to see one or two of the other effects which I have devised. On this side is the armory, and beyond it the library. My collection of books is a limited one, there are just over the hundred thousand volumes, but it is to some extent remarkable for quality. I have a Visigoth Bible of the fifth century, which I rather fancy is unique. There is a *Biblia Pauperum* of 1430, a MS. of Genesis done upon mulberry leaves, probably of the second century. A *Tristan and Isault* of the eighth century, and some hundred black letters, with five very fine specimens of Schöffer and Faust. But those you may turn over any wet afternoon when you have nothing better to do. Meanwhile I have a little device connected with this smoking-room which may amuse you. Light this other cigar. Now sit with me upon that lounge which stands at the further end of the room."

The sofa in question was in a niche which was lined on three sides and above with perfectly clear, transparent crystal. As they sat down the master of the house drew a cord which pulled down a crystal shutter behind them, so they were enclosed on all sides in a great box of glass, so pure and so highly polished that its presence might very easily be forgotten. A number of golden cords with crystal handles hung down into this small chamber, and appeared to be connected with a long shining bar outside.

"Now, where would you like to smoke your cigar?"

said Raffles Haw, with a twinkle in his demure eyes. "Shall we go to India, or to Egypt, or to China, or to——"

"To South America," said Robert.

There was a tinkle, a whirr, and a sense of motion. The young artist gazed about him in absolute amazement. Look where he would, all round were tree ferns and palms with long drooping creepers, and a blaze of brilliant orchids. Smoking-room, house, England, all were gone, and he sat on a settee in the heart of a virgin forest of the Amazon. It was no mere optical delusion, or trick. He could see the hot steam rising from the tropical undergrowth, the heavy drops falling from the huge green leaves, the very grain and fibre of the rough bark which clothed the trunks. Even as he gazed, a green mottled snake curled noiselessly over a branch above his head, and a bright-colored parroquet broke suddenly from amid the foliage, and flashed off among the tree-trunks. Robert gazed around, speechless with surprise, and finally turned upon his host a face in which curiosity was not unmixed with a suspicion of fear.

"People have been burned for less, have they not?" cried Raffles Haw, laughing heartily. "Have you had enough of the Amazon. What do you say to a spell of Egypt?"

Again the whirr, the swift flash of passing objects, and in an instant a huge desert stretched on every side of them, as far as eye could reach. In the foreground a clump of five palm-trees towered into the air, with a profusion of rough cactus-like plants bristling from their base. On the other side rose a rugged gnarled gray monolith, carved at the foot into a huge scarabæus. A group of lizards played about on the surface of the old

carved stone. Beyond, the yellow sand stretched away into furthest space, where the dim mirage mist played along the horizon.

"Mr. Haw! I cannot understand it!" Robert grasped the velvet edge of the settee, and gazed wildly about him.

"The effect is rather startling, is it not? This Egyptian desert is my favorite when I lay myself out for a contemplative smoke. It seems strange that tobacco should have come from the busy, practical West. It has much more affinity for the dreamy, languid East. But perhaps you would like to run over to China for a change."

"Not to-day," said Robert, passing his hand over his forehead. "I feel a little confused by all these wonders, and indeed I think that they have affected my nerves a little. Besides, it is time that I returned to my prosaic little Elmdene, if I can find my way out of this wilderness to which you have transplanted me. But would you ease my mind, Mr. Haw, by showing me how this thing is done?"

"It is the merest toy—a complex plaything, nothing more. Allow me to explain. I have a line of very large greenhouses which extend from one end of my smoking-room. These different houses are kept at varying degrees of heat and humidity so as to reproduce the exact climates of Egypt, China, and the rest. You see: our crystal chamber is a tramway running with a minimum of friction along a steel rod. By pulling this or that handle I regulate how far it shall go, and it travels, as you have seen, with amazing speed. The effect of my hot-houses is heightened by the roofs being invariably concealed by skies, which are really very admirably painted, and by the introduction of birds and other

creatures which seem to flourish quite as well in artificial as in natural heat. This explains the South American effect."

"But not the Egyptian."

"No. It is certainly rather clever. I had the best man in France, at least the best at those large effects, to paint in that circular background. You understand, the palms, cacti, obelisk, and so on are perfectly genuine, and so is the sand for fifty yards or so, and I defy the keenest-eyed man in England to tell where the deception commences. It is the familiar, and perhaps rather meretricious, effect of a circular panorama, but carried out in the most complete manner. Was there any other point?"

"The crystal box. Why was it?"

"To preserve my guests from the effects of the changes of temperature. It would be a poor kindness to bring them back to my smoking-room drenched through, and with the seeds of a violent cold. The crystal has to be kept warm too, otherwise vapor would deposit and you would have your view spoiled. But must you really go? Then here we are back in the smoking-room. I hope that it will not be your last visit by many a one. And if I may come down to Elmden I should be very glad to do so. This is the way, through the museum."

As Robert McIntyre emerged from the balmy aromatic atmosphere of the great house, into the harsh, raw, biting air of an English winter evening, he felt as though he had been away for a long visit in some foreign country. Time is measured by impressions, and so vivid and novel had been his feelings that weeks and weeks might have elapsed since his chat with the smoke-be-grimed stranger in the road. He walked along with his

head in a whirl, his whole mind possessed and intoxicated by the one idea of the boundless wealth and the immense power of this extraordinary stranger. Small and sordid and mean seemed his own Elmdene as he approached it, and he passed over its threshold full of restless discontent with himself and his surroundings.

CHAPTER V.

LAURA'S REQUEST.

That night, after supper, Robert McIntyre poured forth all that he had seen to his father and to his sister. So full was he of the one subject that it was a relief to him to share his knowledge with others. Rather for his own sake, then, than for theirs, he depicted vividly all the marvels which he had seen, the profusion of wealth, the regal treasure-house of gems, the gold, the marble, the extraordinary devices, the absolute lavishness, and complete disregard for money which was shown in every detail. For an hour he pictured with glowing words all the wonders which had been shown him, and ended with some pride by describing the request which Mr. Raffles Haw had made, and the complete confidence which he had placed in him.

His words had a very different effect upon his two listeners. Old McIntyre leaned back in his chair with a bitter smile upon his lips, his thin face crinkled into a thousand puckers, and his small eyes shining with envy and greed. His lean yellow hand upon the table was clenched until the knuckles gleamed white in the lamp-light. Laura, on the other hand, leaned forward, her lips parted, drinking in her brother's words, with a glow of color upon either cheek. It seemed to Robert, as he glanced from one to the other of them, that he had never seen his father look so evil, or his sister so beautiful.

"Who is the fellow, then?" asked the old man, after a considerable pause. "I hope he got all this in an honest fashion. Five millions in jewels, you say. Good gracious me! Ready to give it away, too, but afraid of pauperizing anyone. You can tell him, Robert, that you know of one very deserving case which has not the slightest objection to being pauperized."

"But who can he possibly be, Robert?" cried Laura. "Haw cannot be his real name. He must be some disguised prince, or perhaps a king in exile. Oh, I should have loved to see those diamonds—and the emeralds. I always think that emeralds suit dark people best. You must tell me again all about that museum, Robert."

"I don't think he is anything more than he pretends to be," her brother answered. "He has the plain, quiet manners of an ordinary middle-class Englishman. There was no particular polish that I could see. He knew a little about books and pictures, just enough to appreciate them, but nothing more. No, I fancy that he is a man quite in our own position of life, who has in some way inherited a vast sum. Of course it is difficult for me to form an estimate, but I should judge that what I saw to-day, house, pictures, jewels, books, and so on, could never have been bought under twenty million, and I am sure that that figure is entirely an underestimate."

"I never knew but one Haw," said old McIntyre, drumming his fingers on the table. "He was a foreman in my pin-fire cartridge-case department. But he was an elderly single man. Well, I hope he got it all honestly. I hope the money is clean."

"And really, really, he is coming to see us!" cried Laura, clapping her hands. "Oh, when do you think

he will come, Robert? Do give me warning. Do you think it will be to-morrow?"

"I am sure I cannot say."

"I should so love to see him. I don't know when I have been so interested."

"Why, you have a letter there," remarked Robert. "From Hector, too, by the foreign stamp. How is he?"

"It only came this evening. I have not opened it yet. To tell the truth, I have been so interested in your story that I have forgotten all about it. Poor old Hector! It is from Madeira." She glanced rapidly over the four pages of straggling writing in the young sailor's bold schoolboyish hand. "Oh, he is all right," she said. "They had a gale on the way out and that sort of thing, but it is all right now. He thinks he may be back by March. I wonder whether your new friend will come to-morrow—your knight of the enchanted castle."

"Hardly so soon, I should fancy."

"If he should be looking about for an investment, Robert," said the father, "you won't forget to tell him what a fine opening there is now in the gun-trade. With my knowledge, and a few thousands at my back, I could bring him in his thirty per cent. as regular as the bank. After all, he must lay out his money somehow. He cannot sink it all in books and precious stones. I am sure that I could give him the highest references."

"It may be a long time before he comes, father," said Robert, coldly; "and when he does I am afraid that I can hardly use his friendship as a means of advancing your interests."

"We are his equals, father," cried Laura, with spirit. "Would you put us on the footing of beggars? He

would think we cared for him only for his money. I wonder that you should think of such a thing."

"If I had not thought of such things where would your education have been, miss?" retorted the angry old man, and Robert stole quietly away to his room, whence amid his canvases he could still hear the hoarse voice and the clear in their never-ending family jangle. More and more sordid seemed the surroundings of his life, and more and more to be valued the peace which money can buy.

Breakfast had hardly been cleared in the morning, and Robert had not yet ascended to his work, when there came a timid tapping at the door, and there was Raffles Haw on the mat outside. Robert ran out and welcomed him with all cordiality.

"I am afraid that I am a very early visitor," he said, apologetically, "but I often take a walk after breakfast." He had no traces of work upon him now, but was trim and neat, with a dark suit and carefully brushed hair. "You spoke yesterday of your work. Perhaps, early as it is, you would allow me the privilege of looking over your studio."

"Pray step in, Mr. Haw," cried Robert, all in a flutter at this advance from so munificent a patron of art. "I shall be only too happy to show you such little work as I have on hand, though indeed I am almost afraid when I think how familiar you are with some of the greatest masterpieces. Allow me to introduce you to my father and my sister Laura."

Old McIntyre bowed low and rubbed his thin hands together, but the young lady gave a gasp of surprise and stared with widely-opened eyes at the millionaire. Haw stepped forward, however, and shook her quietly by the hand.

"I expected to find that it was you," he said. "I have already met your sister, Mr. McIntyre, on the very first day that I came here. We took shelter in a shed from a snowstorm, and had quite a pleasant little chat."

"I had no notion that I was speaking to the owner of the hall," said Laura, in some confusion. "How funny things turn out, to be sure."

"I had often wondered who it was that I spoke to, but it was only yesterday that I discovered. What a sweet little place you have here! It must be charming in summer. Why, if it were not for this hill my windows would look straight across at yours."

"Yes, and we should see all your beautiful plantations," said Laura, standing beside him in the window. "I was wishing only yesterday that the hill was not there."

"Really. I shall be happy to have it removed for you if you would like it."

"Good gracious!" cried Laura. "Why, where would you put it?"

"Oh, they could run it along the line, and dump it anywhere. It is not much of a hill. A few thousand men with proper machinery, and a line of rails brought right up to them, could easily dispose of it in a few months."

"And the poor vicar's house?" Laura asked, laughing.

"Oh, I think that might be got over. We could run him up a facsimile which would perhaps be more convenient to him. Your brother will tell you that I am quite an expert at the designing of houses. But seriously, if you think it would be an improvement I will see what can be done."

"Not for the world, Mr. Haw. Why, I should be a

traitor to the whole village if I were to encourage such a scheme. The hill is the one thing which gives Tamfield the slightest individuality. It would be the height of selfishness to sacrifice it in order to improve the view from Elmdene."

"It is a little box of a place, this, Mr. Haw," said old McIntyre; "I should think you must feel quite stifled in it after your grand mansion, of which my son tells me such wonders. But we were not always accustomed to this sort of thing, Mr. Haw. Humble as I stand here, there was a time, and not so long ago, when I could write as many figures on a check as any gunmaker in Birmingham. It was——"

"He is a dear discontented old papa," cried Laura, throwing her arm round him in a caressing manner. He gave a sharp squeak and a grimace of pain, which he endeavored to hide by an outbreak of painfully artificial coughing.

"Shall we go upstairs," said Robert, hurriedly, anxious to divert his guest's attention from this little domestic incident. "My studio is the real atelier, for it is right up under the tiles. I shall lead the way if you will have the kindness to follow me."

Leaving Laura and Mr. McIntyre, they went up together to the work-room. Mr. Haw stood long in front of the "Signing of Magna Charta" and the "Murder of Thomas à Becket," screwing up his eyes, and twitching nervously at his beard, while Robert stood by in anxious expectancy.

"And how much are these?" asked Raffles Haw, at last.

"I priced them at a hundred a piece when I sent them to London."

"Then the best I can wish you is that the day may

come when you would gladly give ten times the sum to have them back again. I am sure that there are great possibilities in you, and I see that in grouping and in boldness of design you have already achieved much. But your drawing, if you will excuse my saying so, is just a little crude, and your coloring perhaps a trifle thin. Now, I will make a bargain with you, Mr. McIntyre, if you will consent to it. I know that money has no charm to you, but still, as you said when I first met you, a man must live. I shall buy these two canvases from you at the price which you name, subject to the condition that you may always have them back again by repaying the same sum."

"You are really very kind!" Robert hardly knew whether to be delighted at having sold his pictures, or humiliated at the frank criticism of the buyer.

"May I write a check at once?" said Raffles Haw. "Here is pen and ink. So! I shall send a couple of footmen down for them in the afternoon. Well, I shall keep them in trust for you. I dare say that when you are famous they will be of value as specimens of your early manner."

"I am sure that I am extremely obliged to you, Mr. Haw," said the young artist, placing the check in his note-book. He glanced at it as he folded it up, in the vague hope that perhaps this man of whims had assessed his pictures at a higher rate than he had named. The figures, however, were exact. Robert began dimly to perceive that there were drawbacks as well as advantages to the reputation of a money scorner, which he had gained by a few chance words, prompted rather by the reaction against his father, than by his own real convictions.

"I hope, Miss McIntyre," said Raffles Haw, when they

had descended to the sitting-room once more, "that you will do me the honor of coming to see the little curiosities which I have gathered together. Your brother will, I am sure, escort you up, or perhaps Mr. McIntyre would care to come."

"I shall be delighted to come, Mr. Haw," cried Laura, with her sweetest smile. "A good deal of my time just now is taken up in looking after the poor people, who find the cold weather very trying." Robert raised his eyebrows, for it was the first he had heard of his sister's missions of mercy, but Mr. Raffles Haw nodded approvingly. "Robert was telling us of your wonderful hot-houses. I am sure I wish I could transport the whole parish into one of them, and give them a good warm."

"Nothing would be easier, but I am afraid that they might find it a little trying when they came out again. I have one house which is only just finished. Your brother has not seen it yet, but I think it is the best of them all. It represents an Indian jungle, and is hot enough in all conscience."

"I shall so look forward to seeing it," cried Laura, clasping her hands. "It has been one of the dreams of my life to see India. I have read so much of it, the temples, the forests, the great rivers, and the tigers. Why, you would hardly believe it, but I have never seen a tiger except in a picture."

"That can easily be set right," said Raffles Haw, with his quiet smile. "Would you care to see one?"

"Oh, immensely."

"I will have one sent down. Let me see—it is nearly twelve o'clock. I can get a wire to Liverpool by one. There is a man there who deals in such things. I should think he would be due to-morrow morning.

Well, I shall look forward to seeing you all before very long. I have rather overstayed my time, for I am a man of routine, and I always put in a certain number of hours in my laboratory." He shook hands cordially with them all, and lighting his pipe at the doorstep, strolled off upon his way.

"Well, what do you think of him now?" asked Robert, as they watched his black figure against the white snow.

"I think he is no more fit to be trusted with all that money than a child," cried the old man. "It made me positively sick to hear him talk of moving hills and buying tigers, and such-like nonsense, when there are honest men without a business, and great businesses starving for a little capital. It's unchristian — that's what I call it."

"I think he is most delightful, Robert," said Laura. "Remember you have promised to take us up to the hall. And he evidently wishes us to go soon. Don't you think we might go this afternoon?"

"I hardly think that, Laura. You leave it in my hands, and I will manage it all. And now I must get to work, for the light is so very short on these winter days."

That night Robert McIntyre had gone to bed, and was dozing off, when a hand plucked at his shoulder, and he started up to find his sister in some white drapery, with a shawl thrown over her shoulders, standing beside him in the moonlight.

"Robert, dear," she whispered, stooping over him, "there was something I wanted to ask you, but papa was always in the way. You will do something to please me, won't you, Robert?"

"Of course, Laura. What is it?"

"I do hate having my affairs talked over, dear. If Mr. Raffles Haw says anything to you about me, or asks any questions, please don't say anything about Hector. You won't, will you, Robert, for the sake of your little sister?"

"No, not unless you wish it."

"There is a dear good brother." She stooped over him and kissed him tenderly. It was a rare thing for Laura to show any emotion, and her brother marvelled sleepily over it until he relapsed into his interrupted doze.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE VISITOR.

The McIntyre family were seated at breakfast on the morning which followed the first visit of Raffles Haw, when they were surprised to hear the buzz and hum of a multitude of voices in the village street. Nearer and nearer came the tumult, and then, of a sudden, two maddened horses reared themselves up on the other side of the garden hedge, prancing and pawing, with ears laid back, and eyes ever glancing at some horror behind them. Two men hung shouting to their bridles, while a third came rushing up the curved gravel path. Before the McIntyres could realize the situation their maid, Mary, darted into the sitting-room with terror in her round, freckled face.

"If you please, miss," she screamed, "your tiger has arrove."

"Good heavens!" cried Robert, rushing to the door with his half-filled tea-cup in his hand. "This is too much. Here is an iron cage on a trolly with a great ramping tiger, and the whole village with their mouths open."

"Mad as a hatter," shrieked Old McIntyre. "I could see it in his eye. He's spent enough on this beast to start me in business. Who ever heard of such a thing. Tell the driver to take it to the police station."

"Nothing of the sort, papa," said Laura, rising with

dignity, and wrapping a shawl about her shoulders. Her eyes were shining, her cheeks flushed, and she carried herself like a triumphant queen. Robert, with his tea-cup in his hand, allowed his attention to be diverted from their strange visitor while he gazed at his beautiful sister.

"Mr. Raffles Haw has done this out of kindness to me," she said, sweeping toward the door. "I look upon it as a great attention upon his part. I shall certainly go out and look at it."

"If you please, sir," said the carman, reappearing at the door, "it's all as we can do to 'old in the hosses."

"Let us all go out together, then," suggested Robert. They went as far as the garden fence and stared over, while the whole village, from the school children to the old gray-haired men from the alms-houses, gathered round in mute astonishment. The tiger, a long, lithe, venomous-looking creature with two blazing green eyes, paced stealthily round the little cage, lashing its sides with its tail, and rubbing its muzzle against the bars.

"What were your orders?" asked Robert of the carman.

"It came through by special express from Liverpool, sir, and the train is drawn up at the Tamfield siding all ready to take it back. If it 'ad been ryalty the railway folk couldn't have shown it more respec'. We are to take it back when you've done with it. It's been a cruel job, sir, for our arms is pulled clean out of the sockets a-'oldin' in of the 'osses."

"What a dear, sweet creature it is," cried Laura. "How sleek and how graceful! I cannot understand how people could be afraid of anything so beautiful."

"If you please, marm," said the carman, touching his

skin cap, "he out with his paw between the bars as we stood in the station yard, and if I 'adn't pulled my mate Bill back it would ha' been a case of kingdom come. It was a proper near squeak, I can tell ye."

"I never saw anything more lovely," continued Laura, loftily overlooking the remarks of the driver. "It has been a very great pleasure to me to see it, and I hope that you will tell Mr. Haw so if you see him, Robert."

"The horses are very restive," said her brother. "Perhaps, Laura, if you have seen enough it would be as well to let them go."

She bowed in the regal fashion which she had so suddenly adopted. Robert shouted the order, the driver sprang up, his comrades let the horses go, and away rattled the wagon and the trolley with half the Tamfielders streaming vainly behind it.

"Is it not wonderful what money can do?" Laura remarked, as they knocked the snow from their shoes within the porch. "There seems to be no wish which Mr. Haw could not at once gratify."

"No wish of yours, you mean," broke in her father. "It's different when he is dealing with a wrinkled old man, who has spent himself in working for his children. A plainer case of love at first sight I never saw."

"How can you be so coarse, papa?" cried Laura, but her eyes flashed and her teeth gleamed, as though the remark had not altogether displeased her.

"For heaven's sake, be careful, Laura!" cried Robert. "It had not struck me before, but really it does look rather like it. You know how you stand. Raffles Haw is not a man to play with."

"You dear old boy," said Laura, laying her head upon his shoulder, "what do you know of such things? All you have to do is to go on with your painting, and

to remember the promise you made me the other night."

"What promise was that, then?" cried old McIntyre, suspiciously.

"Never you mind, papa. But if you forget it, Robert, I shall never forgive you as long as I live."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORKINGS OF WEALTH.

It can easily be believed that as the weeks passed the name and fame of the mysterious owner of the new hall resounded over the quiet countryside until the rumor of him had spread to the remotest corners of Warwickshire and Staffordshire. In Birmingham on the one side, and in Coventry and Leamington on the other, there was gossip as to his untold riches, his extraordinary whims, and the remarkable life which he led. His name was bandied from mouth to mouth, and a thousand efforts were made to find out who and what he was. In spite of all their pains, however, the newsmongers were unable to discover the slightest trace of his antecedents, or to form even a guess as to the secret of his riches.

It was no wonder that conjecture was rife upon the subject, for hardly a day passed without furnishing some new instance of the boundlessness of his power, and of the goodness of his heart. Through the vicar, Robert, and others, he had learned much of the inner life of the parish, and many were the times when the struggling man, harassed and driven to the wall, found, thrust into his hands some morning, a brief note with an enclosure which rolled all the sorrow back from his life. One day a thick, double-breasted pea-jacket and a pair of good sturdy boots were served out to every old man in the almshouse. On another, Miss Swire, the decayed gentlewoman who eked out her small annuity by needle-

work, had a brand new, first-class sewing-machine handed into her, to take the place of the old worn-out treadle which tried her rheumatic joints. The pale-faced school-master who had spent years with hardly a break in struggling with the juvenile obtuseness of Tamfield, received through the post a circular ticket for a two-months' tour through Southern Europe, with hotel coupons and all complete. John Hackett, the farmer, after five long years of bad seasons borne with a brave heart, had at last been overthrown by the sixth, and had the bailiffs actually in the house, when the good vicar had rushed in waving a note above his head, to tell him not only that his deficit had been made up, but that enough remained over to provide the improved machinery which would enable him to hold his own for the future. An almost superstitious feeling came upon the rustic folk as they looked at the great house when the sun gleamed upon the huge hot-houses, or even more so, perhaps, when at night the brilliant electric lights shot their white radiance through the countless rows of windows. To them it was as if some minor Providence presided in that great palace, unseen but seeing all, boundless in its power and in its graciousness, ever ready to assist and to befriend. In every good deed, however, Raffles Haw still remained in the background, while the vicar and Robert had the pleasant task of conveying his benefits to the lowly and the suffering.

Once only did he appear in his own person, and that was upon the famous occasion when he saved the well-known bank of Garraweg Brothers in Birmingham. The most charitable and upright of men, the two brothers, Louis and Rupert, had built up a business which extended its ramifications into every townlet of four counties. The failure of their London agents had brought a

heavy loss upon them, and the circumstance leaking out, had caused a sudden and most dangerous run upon their establishment. Urgent telegrams for bullion from all their forty branches poured in at the very instant when the head office was crowded with anxious clients, all waving their deposit books and clamoring for their money. Bravely did the two brothers with their staff stand with smiling faces behind the shining counter, while swift messengers sped, and telegrams flashed, to draw in all the available resources of the bank. All day the stream poured through the office, and when four o'clock came, and the doors were closed for the day, the street without was still blocked by the expectant crowd, while there remained scarce a thousand pounds of bullion in the cellars.

"It is only postponed, Louis," said brother Rupert, despairingly, when the last clerk had left the office, and when at last they could relax the fixed smile upon their haggard faces.

"Those shutters will never come down again," cried brother Louis, and the two suddenly burst out sobbing in each other's arms, not for their own griefs, but for the miseries which they might bring upon those who had trusted them.

But who shall ever dare to say that there is no hope, if he will but give his griefs to the world? That very night Mrs. Spurling had received a letter from her old school-friend, Mrs. Louis Garraweg, with all her fears and her hopes poured out in it, and the whole sad story of their troubles. Swift from the vicarage went the message to the hall, and early next morning Mr. Raffles Haw, with a great black carpet-bag in his hand, found means to draw the cashier of the local branch of the Bank of England from his breakfast, and to persuade

him to open his doors at unofficial hours. By half-past nine the crowd had already begun to collect around Garraweg's when a stranger, pale and thin, with a bloated carpet-bag, was shown at his own very pressing request into the bank parlor.

"It is no use, sir," said the elder brother, humbly, as they stood together encouraging each other to turn a brave face to misfortune. "We can do no more. We have little left, and it would be unfair to the others to pay you now. We can but hope that when our assets are realized no one will be the loser save ourselves."

"I did not come to draw out, but to put in," said Raffles Haw, in his demure apologetic fashion. "I have in my bag five thousand hundred-pound Bank of England notes. If you will have the goodness to place them to my credit account, I should be extremely obliged."

"But, good heavens, sir," stammered Rupert Garraweg, "have you not heard? Have you not seen? We cannot allow you to do this thing blindfold. Can we, Louis?"

"Most certainly not. We cannot recommend our bank, sir, at the present moment, for there is a run upon us, and we do not know to what lengths it may go."

"Tut! tut!" said Raffles Haw. "If the run continues you must send me a wire, and I shall make a small addition to my account. You will send me a receipt by post. Good-morning, gentlemen!" He bowed himself out ere the astonished partners could realize what had befallen them, or raise their eyes from the huge black bag and the visiting card which lay upon their table. There was no great failure in Birmingham that day, and the house of Garraweg still survives to enjoy the success which it deserves.

Such were the deeds by which Raffles Haw made himself known throughout the Midlands. And yet, in spite of all his open-handedness, he was not a man to be imposed upon. In vain the sturdy beggar cringed at his gate, and in vain the crafty letter-writer poured out a thousand fabulous woes upon paper. Robert was astonished, when he brought some tale of trouble to the hall, to observe how swift was the perception of the recluse, and how unerringly he could detect a flaw in a narrative, or lay his finger upon the one point which rang false. Were a man strong enough to help himself, or of such a nature as to profit nothing by help, none would he get from the master of the new hall. In vain, for example, did old McIntyre throw himself continually across the path of the millionaire, and impress upon him, by a thousand hints and innuendoes, the hard fortune which had been dealt him, and the ease with which his fallen greatness might be restored. Raffles Haw listened politely, bowed, smiled, but never showed the slightest inclination to restore the querulous old gunmaker to his pedestal.

But if the recluse's wealth was a lure which drew the beggars from far and near as a lamp draws the moths, it had the same power of attraction upon another and much more dangerous class. Strange hard faces were seen in the village street, prowling figures were marked at night stealing about among the fir plantations, and warning messages arrived from city police and county constabulary to say that evil visitors were known to have taken train to Tamfield. But if, as Raffles Haw held, there were few limits to the power of immense wealth, it possessed among other things the power of self-preservation as one or two people were to learn to their cost.

"Would you mind stepping up to the hall," he said one morning, putting his head in at the door of the Elmdene sitting room. "I have something there that might amuse you." He was on intimate terms with the McIntyres now, and there were few days on which they did not see something of each other.

They gladly accompanied him, all three, for such invitations were usually the prelude of some agreeable surprise which he had in store for them.

"I have shown you a tiger," he remarked to Laura, as he led them into the dining-room. "I will now show you something quite as dangerous, though not nearly so pretty." There was an arrangement of mirrors at one end of the room, with a large circular glass at a sharp angle at the top.

"Look in there—in the upper glass," said Raffles Haw.

"Good gracious, what dreadful-looking men!" cried Laura. "There are two of them, and I don't know which is the worse."

"What on earth are they doing?" asked Robert. "They appear to be sitting on the ground in some sort of a cellar."

"Most dangerous-looking characters," said the old man. "I should strongly recommend you to send for a policeman."

"I have done so. But it seems a work of supererogation to take them to prison, for they are very snugly in prison already. However, I suppose that the law must have its own."

"And who are they, and how did they come there? Do tell us, Mr. Haw." Laura McIntyre had a pretty, beseeching way with her which went rather piquantly with her queenly style of beauty.

"I know no more than you do. They were not there last night, and they are here this morning, so I suppose it is a safe inference that they came in during the night, especially as my servants found the window open when they came down. As to their character and intentions, I should think that is pretty legible upon their faces. They look a pair of beauties, don't they?"

"But I cannot understand in the least where they are," said Robert, staring into the mirror. "One of them has taken to butting his head against the wall. No, he is bending so that the other may stand upon his back. He is up there now and the light is shining upon his face. What a bewildered ruffianly face it is, too. I should so like to sketch it. It would be a study for the picture I am thinking of, of 'The Reign of Terror.'"

"I have caught them in my patent burglar trap," said Haw. "They are my first birds, but I have no doubt that they will not be the last. I will show you how it works. It is quite a new thing. This flooring is now as strong as possible, but every night I disconnect it. It is done simultaneously by a central machine for every room on the ground floor. When the floor is disconnected one may advance three or four steps, either from the window or door, and then that whole part turns on a hinge and slides you into a padded strong room beneath, where you may kick your heels until you are released. There is a central oasis, between the hinges, where the furniture is grouped for the night. The flooring flies into position again when the weight of the intruder is removed, and there he must bide, while I can always take a peep at him by this simple little optical arrangement. I thought it might amuse you to have a look at my prisoners before I handed them over to the head constable, who I see is now coming up the avenue."

"The poor burglars!" cried Laura. "It is no wonder that they look bewildered, for I suppose, Mr. Haw, that they neither know where they are nor how they came there. I am so glad to know that you guard yourself in this way, for I have often thought that you ran a danger."

"Have you so?" said he, smiling round at her. "I think that my house is fairly burglar-proof. I have one window which may be used as an entrance, the centre one of the three of my laboratory. I keep it so because, to tell the truth, I am somewhat of a night prowler myself, and when I treat myself to a ramble under the stars I like to slip in and out without ceremony. It would however be a fortunate rogue who picked the only safe entrance out of a hundred, and even then he might find pitfalls. Here is the constable, but you must not go, for Miss McIntyre has still something to see in my little place. If you will step into the billiard-room I will be with you in a very few moments."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BILLIONAIRE'S PLANS.

That morning, and many mornings, both before and afterward, were spent by Laura at the new hall examining the treasures of the museum, playing with the thousand costly toys which Raffles Haw had collected, or sallying out from the smoking-room in the crystal chamber, into the long line of luxurious hot-houses. Haw would walk demurely beside her as she flitted from one thing to another, like a butterfly among flowers, watching her out of the corner of his eyes, and taking a quiet pleasure in her delight. The only joy which his costly possessions had ever brought him was that which came from the entertainment of others.

By this time his attentions toward Laura McIntyre had become so marked that they could hardly be mistaken. He visibly brightened in her presence, and was never weary of devising a thousand methods of surprising and pleasing her. Every morning, ere the McIntyre family were afoot, a great bouquet of strange and beautiful flowers was brought down by a footman from the hall, to brighten their breakfast-table. Her slightest wish, however fantastic, was instantly satisfied, if human money or ingenuity could do it. When the frost lasted a stream was dammed and turned from its course that it might flood two meadows, solely in order that she might have a place upon which to skate. With the thaw there came a groom every afternoon, with a sleek and

beautiful mare, in case Miss McIntyre should care to ride. Everything went to show that she had made a conquest of the recluse of the new hall.

And she, on her side, played her part admirably. With female adaptiveness she fell in with his humor and looked at the world through his eyes. Her talk was of alms-houses and free libraries, of charities and of improvements. He had never a scheme that she could not add some detail to which made it more complete and more effective. To Haw it seemed that at last he had met a mind which was in absolute affinity with his own. Here was a helpmate who could not only follow but even lead him in the path which he had chosen.

Neither Robert nor his father could fail to see what was going forward, but to the latter nothing could possibly be more acceptable than a family tie which should connect him, however indirectly, with a man of vast fortune. The glamour of the gold bags had crept over Robert also, and froze the remonstrance upon his lips. It was very pleasant to have the handling of all this wealth, even as a mere agent. Why should he do or say what might disturb their present happy relations? It was his sister's business, not his, and as to Hector Spurling, he must take his chance, as other men did. It was obviously best not to move one way or the other in the matter.

But to Robert himself, his work and his surroundings were becoming more and more irksome. His joy in his art had become less keen since he had known Raffles Haw. It seemed so hard to toil and slave to earn such a trifling sum when money could really be had for the asking. It was true that he had asked for none, but large sums were forever passing through his hands for those who were needy, and if he were needy himself his

friend would surely not grudge it to him. So the Roman galleys still remained faintly outlined upon the great canvas, while Robert's days were spent either in the luxurious library at the hall, or in strolling about the country listening to tales of trouble, and returning like a tweed-suited ministering angel to carry Raffles Haw's help to the unfortunate. It was not an ambitious life, but it was one which was very congenial to his weak and easy-going nature.

Robert had observed that fits of depression had frequently come upon the millionaire, and it had sometimes struck him that the enormous sums which he spent had possibly made a serious inroad into his capital, and that his mind was troubled as to the future. His abstracted manner, his clouded brow, and his bent head all spoke of a soul that was weighed down with care, and it was only in Laura's presence that he could throw off the load of his secret trouble. For five hours a day he buried himself in the laboratory and amused himself with his hobby, but it was one of his whims that no one, neither any of his servants, nor even Laura or Robert, should ever cross the threshold of that outlying building. Day after day he vanished into it, to reappear hours afterward pale and exhausted, while the whirr of machinery and the smoke which streamed from his high chimney showed how considerable were the operations which he undertook single-handed.

"Could I not assist you in any way?" suggested Robert, as they sat together after luncheon in the smoking-room. "I am convinced that you over-try your strength. I should be so glad to help you, and I know a little of chemistry."

"Do you, indeed?" said Raffles Haw, raising his eye brows. "I had no idea of that. It is so very sel-

dom that the artistic and the scientific faculties go together."

"I don't know that I have either particularly developed, but I have taken classes, and I worked for two years in the laboratory at Sir Josiah Mason's Institute."

"I am delighted to hear it," Haw replied, with emphasis. "That may be of great importance to us. It is very possible—indeed almost certain—that I shall avail myself of your offer of assistance, and teach you something of my chemical methods, which I may say differ considerably from those of the orthodox school. The time, however, is hardly ripe for that. What is it, Jones?"

"A note, sir." The butler handed it in upon a silver salver. Haw broke the seal and ran his eye over it.

"Tut! tut! It is from Lady Morsley, asking me to the Lord Lieutenant's ball. I cannot possibly accept. It is very kind of them, but I do wish they would leave me alone. Very well, Jones. I shall write. Do you know, Robert, I am often very unhappy." He frequently called the young artist by his Christian name, especially in his more confidential moments.

"I have sometimes feared that you were," said the other, sympathetically. "But how strange it seems, you who are yet young, healthy, with every faculty for enjoyment, and a millionaire."

"Ah, Robert," cried Haw, leaning back in his chair, and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. "You have put your finger upon my trouble. If I were a millionaire I might be happy, but alas I am no millionaire."

"Good heavens!" gasped Robert. Cold seemed to shoot to his inmost soul as it flashed upon him that this was a prelude to a confession of impending bankruptcy,

and that all this glorious life, all the excitement and the color and change were about to vanish into thin air.

"No millionaire!" he stammered.

"No, Robert. I am a billionaire—perhaps the only one in the world. That is what is on my mind, and why I am unhappy sometimes. I feel that I should spend this money—that I should put it in circulation—and yet it is so hard to do it without failing to do good—without doing positive harm. I feel my responsibility deeply. It weighs me down. Am I justified in continuing to live this quiet life when there are so many millions whom I might save and comfort if I could but reach them."

Robert heaved a long sigh of relief. "Perhaps you take too grave a view of your responsibilities," he said. "Everybody knows that the good which you have done is immense. What more could you desire? If you really wish to extend your benevolence further there are organized charities everywhere which would be very glad of your help."

"I have the names of two hundred and seventy of them," Haw answered. "You must run your eye over them some time and see if you can suggest any others. I send my annual mite to each of them. I don't think there is much room for expansion in that direction."

"Well, really, you have done your share, and more than your share. I would settle down to lead a happy life and think no more of the matter."

"I could not do that," Haw answered, earnestly; "I have not been singled out to wield this immense power simply in order that I might lead a happy life. I can never believe that. Now, can you not use your imagination, Robert, and devise methods by which a man who has command of—well, let us say for argument's

sake, of boundless wealth, could benefit mankind by it, without taking away anyone's independence or in any way doing harm?"

"Well, really, now that I come to think of it, it is a very difficult problem," said Robert.

"Now I will submit a few schemes to you, and you may give me your opinion on them. Supposing that such a man were to buy ten square miles of ground here in Staffordshire, and were to build upon it a neat city consisting entirely of clean, comfortable, four-roomed houses, furnished in a simple style, with shops and so forth, but no public houses. Supposing, too, that he was to offer a house free to all the homeless folk, all the tramps, and broken men, and out-of-workers in Great Britain. Then, having collected them together, let him employ them, under fitting superintendence, upon some colossal piece of work which would last for many years, and perhaps be a permanent value to humanity. Give them a good rate of pay and let their hours of labor be reasonable, and those of recreation be pleasant. Might you not benefit them and benefit humanity at one stroke?"

"But what form of work could you devise which would employ so vast a number for so long a time, and yet not compete with any existing industry? To do the latter would simply mean to shift the misery from one class to another."

"Precisely so. I should compete with no one. What I thought of doing was of sinking a shaft through the earth's crust and of establishing rapid communication with the antipodes. When you had got a certain distance down—how far is an interesting mathematical problem—the centre of gravity would be beneath you, presuming that your boring was not quite directed

toward the centre, and you could then lay down rails and tunnel as if you were on a level."

Then for the first time it flashed into Robert McIntyre's head that his father's chance words were correct, and that he was in the presence of a madman. His great wealth had clearly turned his brain and made him a monomaniac. He nodded indulgently as when one humors a child.

"It would be very nice," he said. "I have heard, however, that the interior of the earth is molten, and your workmen would need to be salamanders."

"The latest scientific data do not bear out the idea that the earth is so hot," answered Raffles Haw. "It is certain that the increased temperature in coal mines depends upon the barometric pressure. There are gases in the earth which may be ignited, and there are combustible materials, as we see in the volcanoes, but if we come across anything of the sort in our borings we could turn a river or two down the shaft, and get the better of it in that fashion."

"It would be rather awkward if the other end of your shaft came out under the Pacific Ocean," said Robert, choking down his inclination to laugh.

"I have had estimates and calculations from the first living engineers, French, English, and American. The point of exit of the tunnel could be calculated to the yard. That portfolio in the corner is full of sections, plans, and diagrams. I have agents employed in buying up land, and if all goes well we may get to work in the autumn. That is one device which may produce results. Another is canal cutting."

"Ah, there you would compete with the railways."

"You don't quite understand. I intend to cut canals through every neck of land where such a convenience

would facilitate commerce. Such a scheme, when unaccompanied by any toll upon vessels, would, I think, be a very judicious way of helping the human race."

"And where, pray, would you cut the canals?" asked Robert.

"I have a map of the world here," Haw answered, rising and taking one down from the paper-rack. "You see the blue pencil-marks. Those are the points where I propose to establish communication. Of course I should begin by the obvious duty of finishing the Panama business."

"Naturally!" The man's lunacy was becoming more and more obvious, and yet there was such precision and coolness in his manner that Robert found himself, against his own reason, endorsing and speculating over his plans.

"The Isthmus of Corinth also occurs to me. That, however, is a small matter from either a financial or an engineering point of view. I propose, however, to make a juncture here, through Kiel, between the German Ocean and the Baltic. It saves, you will observe, the whole journey round the coast of Denmark, and would facilitate our trade with Germany and Russia. Another very obvious improvement is to join the Forth and Clyde, so as to connect Keith with the Irish and American routes. You see the blue line "

"Quite so."

"And we will have a little cutting here. It will run from Uleaborg to Kern, and will connect the White Sea with the Gulf of Bothnia. We must not allow our sympathies to be insular, must we? Our little charities should be cosmopolitan. We will try and give the good people of Archangel a better outlet for their furs and their tallow."

"But it will freeze."

"For six months in the year. Still it will be something. Then we must do something for the East. It would never do to overlook the East."

"It would certainly be an oversight," said Robert, who was keenly alive to the comical side of the question. Raffles Haw, however, in deadly earnest, sat scratching away at his map with his blue pencil.

"Here is a point where we might be of some little use. If we cut through from Batoum to the Kura River we might tap the trade of the Caspian and open up communication with all the rivers which run into it. You notice that they include a considerable tract of country. Then again, I think we might venture upon a little cutting between Beirut, on the Mediterranean, and the upper waters of the Euphrates, which would lead us into the Persian Gulf. Those are one or two of the more obvious canals which might knit the human race into a closer whole."

"Your plans are certainly stupendous," said Robert, uncertain whether to laugh or to be awe-struck. "You will cease to be a man, and become one of the great forces of nature, altering, moulding, and improving."

"That is precisely the view which I take of myself. That is why I feel my responsibility so acutely."

"But surely, if you will do all this you may rest. It is a considerable programme."

"Not at all. I am a patriotic Briton, and I should like to do something to leave my name in the annals of my country. I should like, however, to do it after my own death, as anything in the shape of publicity and honors is very offensive to me. I have therefore put by eight hundred million in a place which shall be duly mentioned in my will, which I propose to devote to paying

off the National debt. I cannot see that any harm could arise from its extinction."

Robert sat staring, struck dumb by the audacity of this strange man's words.

"Then there is the heating of the soil. There is room for improvement there. You have no doubt read of the immense yields which have resulted, in Jersey and elsewhere, from the running of hot-water pipes through the soil. The crops are trebled and quadrupled. I would propose to try the experiment upon a larger scale. We might possibly reserve the Isle of Man to serve as a pumping and heating station. The main pipes would run to England, Ireland, and Scotland, where they would subdivide rapidly until they formed a network two feet deep under the whole country. A pipe at distances of a yard would suffice for every purpose."

"I am afraid," suggested Robert, "that the water which left the Isle of Man warm might lose a little of its virtue before it reached Caithness, for example."

"There need not be any difficulty there. Every few miles a furnace might be arranged to keep up the temperature. These are a few of my plans for the future, Robert, and I shall want the co-operation of disinterested men, like yourself, in all of them. But how brightly the sun shines, and how sweet the country-side looks. The world is very beautiful, and I should like to leave it happier than I found it. Let us walk out together, Robert, and you will tell me of any fresh cases where I may be of assistance."

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

Whatever good Mr. Raffles Haw's wealth did the world, there could be no doubt that there were cases where it did harm. The very contemplation and thought of it had upon many a disturbing and mischievous effect. Especially was this the case with the old gun-maker. From being merely a querulous and grasping man, he had now become bitter, brooding, and dangerous. Week by week, as he saw the tide of wealth flow, as it were, through his very house without being able to divert the smallest rill to nourish his own fortunes, he became more wolfish and more hungry-eyed. He spoke less of his own wrongs, but he brooded more, and would stand for hours on Tamfield Hill looking down at the great palace beneath, as a thirst-stricken man might gaze at the desert mirage.

He had worked and peeped and pried, too, until there were points upon which he knew more than either his son or his daughter.

"I suppose that you still don't know where your friend gets his money?" he remarked to Robert one morning, as they walked together through the village.

"No, father, I do not. I only know that he spends it very well."

"Well!" snarled the old man. "Yes, very well! He has helped every tramp and slut and worthless vagabond over the country-side, but he will not advance a pound,

even on the best security, to help a respectable business man to fight against misfortune."

"My dear father, I really cannot argue with you about it," said Robert. "I have already told you more than once what I think. Mr. Haw's object is to help those who are destitute. He looks upon us as his equals, and would not presume to patronize us, or to act as if we could not help ourselves. It would be a humiliation to us to take his money."

"Pshaw! Besides it is only a question of an advance, and advances are made every day among business men. How can you talk such nonsense, Robert?" Early as it was, his son could see from his excited, quarrelsome manner that the old man had been drinking. The habit had grown upon him of late, and it was seldom now that he was entirely sober.

"Mr. Raffles Haw is the best judge," said Robert, coldly. "If he earns the money, he has a right to spend it as he likes."

"And how does he earn it? You don't know, Robert. You don't know that you are aiding and abetting a felony when you help him to flitter it away. Was ever so much money earned in an honest fashion? I tell you there never was. I tell you also that lumps of gold are no more to that man than chunks of coal to the miners over yonder. He could build his house of them and think nothing of it."

"I know that he is very rich, father. I think, however, that he has an extravagant way of talking sometimes, and that his imagination carries him away. I have heard him talk of plans which the richest man upon earth could not possibly hope to carry through."

"Don't you make any mistake, my son. Your poor old father isn't quite a fool, though he is only an honest

broken merchant." He looked up sideways at his son with a wink and a most unpleasant leer. "Where there's money, I can smell it. There is money there, and heaps of it. It's my belief that he is the richest man in the world, though, how he came to be so, I should not like to guarantee. I'm not quite blind yet, Robert. Have you seen the weekly wagon?"

"The weekly wagon!"

"Yes, Robert. You see I can find some news for you yet. It is due this morning. Every Saturday morning you will see the wagon come in. Why, here it is now, as I am a living man, coming round the curve."

Robert glanced back and saw a great heavy wagon, drawn by two strong horses, lumbering slowly along the road which led to the new hall. From the efforts of the animals and its slow pace, the contents seemed to be of great weight.

"Just you wait here," cried old McIntyre, plucking at his son's sleeve with his thin bony hand. "Wait here and see it pass. Then we will watch what becomes of it."

They stood by the side of the road until it came abreast of them. The wagon was covered with tarpaulin sheetings in front and at the sides, but behind some glimpse could be caught of the contents. They consisted, as far as Robert could see, of a number of packets of the same shape, each about two feet long and six inches high, arranged symmetrically upon the top of each other. Each packet was surrounded by a covering of coarse sacking.

"What do you think of that?" asked old McIntyre, triumphantly, as the load creaked past.

"Why, father? What do you make of it?"

"I have watched it, Robert; I have watched it every Saturday, and I had my chance of looking a little deeper

into it. You remember the day when the elm blew down and the road was blocked until they could saw it in two. That was on a Saturday, and the wagon came to a stand until they could clear a way for it. I was there, Robert, and I saw my chance. I strolled behind the wagon, and I placed my hands upon one of those packets. They look small, do they not? It would take a strong man to lift one. They are heavy, Robert, heavy, and hard with the hardness of metal. I tell you, boy, that that wagon is loaded with gold."

"Gold!"

"With solid bars of gold, Robert. But come into the plantation, and we shall see what becomes of it."

They passed through the lodge gates, behind the wagon, and then wandered off among the fir-trees until they gained a spot where they could command a view. The load had halted, not in front of the house, but at the door of the outbuilding with the chimney. A staff of stablemen and footmen were in readiness, who proceeded to swiftly unload, and to carry the packages through the door. It was the first time that Robert had ever seen anyone, save the master of the house, enter the laboratory. No sign was seen of him now, however, and in half an hour the contents had all been safely stored, and the wagon had driven briskly away.

"I cannot understand it, father," said Robert, thoughtfully, as they resumed their walk. "Supposing that your supposition is correct, who would send him such quantities of gold, and where could it come from?"

"Ha, you have to come to the old man after all," chuckled his companion. "I can see the little game. It is clear enough to me. There are two of them in it. You understand. The other one gets the gold. Never mind how, but we will hope that there is no harm.

Let us suppose, for example, that they have found a marvellous mine, where you can just shovel it out, like clay from that pit. Well then, he sends it on to this one, and he has his furnaces and his chemicals, and he refines and purifies and makes it fit to sell. That's my explanation of it, Robert. Eh, has the old man put his finger on it?"

"But if that were true, father, the gold must go back again."

"So it does, Robert, but a little at a time. Ah ha, I've had my eyes open, you see. Every night it goes down in a small cart and is sent on to London by the seven-forty. Not in bars this time, but done up in iron-bound chests. I've seen them, boy, and I've had this hand upon them."

"Well," said the young man, thoughtfully, "may be you are right. It is possible that you are."

While father and son were prying into his secrets, Raffles Haw had found his way to Elmdene, where Laura sat reading *The Queen* by the fire.

"I am so sorry," she said, throwing down her paper and springing to her feet. "They are all out except me. But I am sure that they won't be long. I expect Robert every moment."

"I would rather speak to you alone," answered Raffles Haw, quietly. "Pray sit down, for I wanted to have a little chat with you."

Laura resumed her seat with a flush upon her cheeks and a quickening of her breath. She turned her face away and gazed into the fire, but there was a sparkle in her eyes which was not caught from the leaping flames.

"Do you remember the first time that we met, Miss McIntyre?" he asked, standing on the rug, and looking

down at her dark hair and the beautifully feminine curve of her ivory neck.

"As if it were yesterday," she answered, in her sweet, mellow tones.

"Then you must also remember the wild words that I said when we parted. It was very foolish of me. I am sure that I am most sorry if I frightened or disturbed you, but I have been a very solitary man for a long time, and I have dropped into a bad habit of thinking aloud. Your voice, your face, your manner were all so like my ideal of a true woman, loving, faithful, and sympathetic, that I could not help wondering whether if I were a poor man I might ever hope to win the affection of such a one."

"Your good opinion, Mr. Raffles Haw, is very dear to me," said Laura. "I assure you that I was not frightened, and that there is no need to apologize for what was really a compliment."

"Since then I have found," he continued, "that all that I had read upon your face was true; that your mind is indeed that of the true woman, full of the noblest and sweetest qualities which human nature can aspire to. You know that I am a man of fortune, but I wish you to dismiss that consideration from your mind. Do you think, from what you know of my character, that you could be happy as my wife, Laura?"

She made no answer, but still sat with her head turned away, and her sparkling eyes fixed upon the fire. One little foot from under her skirt tapped nervously upon the rug.

"It is only right that you should know a little more about me before you decide. There is, however, little to know. I am an orphan, and, as far as I know, without a relation upon earth. My father was a respectable

man, a country surgeon in Wales, and he brought me up to his own profession. Before I had passed my examinations, however, he died and left me a small annuity. I had conceived a great liking for the subjects of chemistry and of electricity, and instead of going on with my medical work, I devoted myself entirely to these studies, and eventually built myself a laboratory where I could follow out my own researches. At about this time I came into a very large sum of money, so large as to make me feel that a vast responsibility rested upon me in the use which I made of it. After some thought I determined to build a large house in a quiet part of the country, not too far from a great centre. There I would be in touch with the world, and yet would have quiet and leisure to mature the schemes which were in my head. As it chanced, I chose Tamfield as my site. All that remains now is to carry out the plans which I have made, and to endeavor to lighten the earth of some of the misery and injustice which weigh it down. I again ask you, Laura, will you throw in your lot with mine, and help me in the life's work which lies before me?"

Laura looked up at him, at his stringy figure, his pale face, his keen and yet gentle eyes. Somehow, as she looked there seemed to form itself beside him some shadow of Hector Spurling, the manly features, the clear, firm mouth, the frank eyes. Now, in the very moment of her triumph it sprang clearly up in her mind how at the hour of their ruin he had stood firmly by them, and had loved the penniless girl as tenderly as the heiress to fortune. That last embrace at the door, too, came back to her, and she felt his lips warm upon her own.

"I am very much honored, Mr. Haw," she stammered.

"But this is so sudden. I have had no time to think. I do not know what to say."

"Do not let me hurry you," he cried, earnestly. "I beg that you will think well over it. I shall come again for my answer. When shall I come? To-night?"

"Yes. Come to-night."

"Then adieu. Believe me, that I think more highly of you for your hesitation. I shall live in hope." He raised her hand to his lips, and left her to her own thoughts.

And what those thoughts were did not long remain in doubt. Dimmer and dimmer grew the vision of the distant sailor face, clearer and clearer the image of the vast palace, of the queenly power, of the diamonds, the gold, the ambitious future. It all lay at her feet waiting to be picked up. How could she have hesitated even for a moment? She rose, and walking over to her desk, she took out a sheet of paper and an envelope. The letter she addressed to "Lieutenant Spurling, H. M. S. Active, Gibraltar." The note cost some little trouble, but at last she got it worded to her mind.

"Dear Hector," she said, "I am convinced that your father has never entirely approved of our engagement, otherwise he would not have thrown obstacles in the way of our marriage. I am sure, too, that since my poor father's misfortunes it is only your own sense of honor and feeling of duty which has kept you true to me, and that you would have done infinitely better had you never seen me. I cannot bear, Hector, to allow you to imperil your future for my sake, and I have determined, after thinking well over the matter, to release you from our boy and girl engagement, so that you may be entirely free in every way. It is possible that you may think it unkind of me to do this now, but I am

quite sure, dear Hector, that when you are an admiral and a very distinguished man, you will look back at this, and you will see that I have been a true friend to you, and have prevented you from making a false step early in your career. For myself, whether I marry or not, I have determined to devote the remainder of my life to trying to do good, and to leaving the world happier than I found it. Your father is very well, and gave us a capital sermon last Sunday. I enclose the banknote which you asked me to keep for you. Good-by forever, dear Hector, and believe me when I say that, come what may, I am ever your true friend,

“LAURA S. MCINTYRE.”

She had hardly sealed up the letter before her father and Robert returned. She closed the door behind them, and made them a little courtesy.

“I await my family’s congratulations,” she said, with her head in the air. “Raffles Haw has been here, and he has asked me to be his wife.”

“The deuce he did!” cried the old man; “and you said?”

“I am to see him again.”

“And you will say?”

“I will accept him.”

“You were always a good girl, Laura,” said old McIntyre, standing on his tiptoes to kiss her.

“But Laura, Laura, how about Hector?” asked Robert, in mild remonstrance.

“Oh, I have written to him,” his sister answered, carelessly. “I wish you would be good enough to post the letter.”

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT SECRET.

And so Laura McIntyre became duly engaged to Raffles Haw, and old McIntyre grew even more hungry-looking as he felt himself a step nearer to the source of wealth; while Robert thought less of work than ever, and never gave as much as a thought to the great canvas which still stood, dust-covered, upon his easel. Haw gave Laura an engagement ring of old gold with a great blazing diamond bulging out of it. There was little talk about the matter, however, for it was Haw's wish that all should be done very quietly. Nearly all his evenings were spent at Elmdene, where he and Laura would build up the most colossal schemes of philanthropy for the future. With a map stretched out on the table in front of them, these two young people would, as it were, hover over the world, planning, devising, and improving.

"Bless the girl!" said old McIntyre to his son, "she speaks about it as if she were born to millions. Maybe, when once she is married, she won't be so ready to chuck her money into every mad scheme that her husband can think of."

"Laura is greatly changed," Robert answered; "she has grown much more serious in her ideas."

"You wait a bit!" sniggered his father; "she is a good girl, is Laura, and she knows what she is about. She's not a girl to let her old dad go to the wall, if she can

set him right. It's a pretty state of things," he added, bitterly. "Here's my daughter going to marry a man who thinks no more of gold than I used to of gun-metal, and here's my son going about with all the money he cares to ask for to help every ne'er-do-well in Staffordshire, and here's their father, who loved them and cared for them, and brought them both up, without money enough very often to buy a bottle of brandy. I don't know what your poor dear mother would have thought of it."

"You have only to ask for what you want."

"Yes, as if I were a five-year-old child. But I tell you, Robert, I'll have my rights, and if I can't get them one way I will another. I won't be treated as if I were no one. And there's one thing. If I am to be this man's pa-in-law, I'll want to know something about him and his money first. We may be poor, but we are honest. I'll up to the hall now, and have it out with him." He seized his hat and stick and made for the door.

"No, no, father," cried Robert, catching him by the sleeve. "You had better leave the matter alone. Mr. Haw is a very sensitive man. He would not like to be examined upon such a point. It might lead to a serious quarrel. I beg that you will not go."

"I am not to be put off forever," snarled the old man, who had been drinking heavily. "I'll put my foot down now, once and forever." He tugged at his sleeve to free himself from his son's grasp.

"At least you shall not go without Laura knowing. I will call her down, and we shall have her opinion."

"Oh, I don't want to have any scenes," said McIntyre, sulkily, relaxing his efforts. He lived in dread of his daughter, and at his worst moments the mention of her name would serve to restrain him.

"Besides," said Robert, "I have not the slightest doubt that Raffles Haw will see the necessity for giving us some sort of explanation before matters go further. He must understand that we have some claim now to be taken into his confidence."

He had hardly spoken when there was a tap at the door, and the man of whom they were speaking walked in.

"Good-morning, Mr. McIntyre," said he; "Robert, would you mind stepping up to the hall with me. I want to have a little business chat." He looked serious, like a man who is carrying out something which he has well weighed.

They walked up together with hardly a word on either side. Raffles Haw was absorbed in his own thoughts. Robert felt expectant and nervous, for he knew that something of importance lay before him. The winter was almost past now, and the first young shoots were beginning to peep out timidly in the face of the wind and the rain of an English March. The snows were gone, but the country-side looked bleaker and drearier, all shrouded in the haze from the damp sodden meadows.

"By the way, Robert," said Raffles Haw, suddenly, as they walked up the avenue. "Has your great Roman picture gone to London?"

"I have not finished it yet."

"But I know that you are a quick worker. You must be nearly at the end of it."

"No, I am afraid that it has not advanced much since you saw it. For one thing, the light has not been very good."

Raffles Haw said nothing, but a pained expression flashed over his face. When they reached the house he

led the way through the museum. Two great metal cases were lying on the floor.

"I have a small addition there to the gem collection," he remarked as he passed. "They only arrived last night, and I have not opened them yet, but I am given to understand from the letters and invoices that there are some fine specimens. We might arrange them this afternoon, if you care to assist me. Let us go into the smoking-room now."

He threw himself down into a settee and motioned Robert into the arm-chair in front of him.

"Light a cigar," he said. "Press the spring if there is any refreshment which you would like. Now, my dear Robert, confess to me in the first place that you have often thought me mad."

The charge was so direct and so true that the young artist hesitated, hardly knowing how to answer.

"My dear boy, I do not blame you. It was the most natural thing in the world. I should have looked upon anyone as a madman who had talked to me as I have talked to you. But for all that, Robert, you were wrong, and I have never yet in our conversations proposed any scheme which it was not well within my power to carry out. I tell you in all sober earnest that the amount of my income is limited only by my desire, and that all the bankers and financiers combined could not furnish the sums which I can put forward without an effort."

"I have had ample proof of your immense wealth," said Robert.

"And you are very naturally curious as to how that wealth was obtained. Well, I can tell you one thing. The money is perfectly clean. I have robbed no one, cheated no one, sweated no one, ground no one down in the gaining of it. I can read your father's eye, Rob-

ert. I can see that he has done me an injustice in this matter. Well, perhaps he is not to be blamed. Perhaps I also might think uncharitable things if I were in his place. But that is why I now give an explanation to you, Robert, and not to him. You at least have trusted me, and you have a right, before I become one of your family, to know all that I can tell you. Laura also has trusted me, but I know well that she is content still to trust me."

"I would not intrude upon your secrets, Mr. Haw," said Robert, "but of course I cannot deny that I should be very proud and pleased if you cared to confide them to me."

"And I will. Not all. I do not think that I shall ever, while I live, tell all. But I shall leave directions behind me, so that if I die you may be able to carry on my unfinished work. I shall tell you where those directions are to be found. In the meantime you must be content to learn the effects which I produce without knowing every detail as to the means."

Robert settled himself down in his chair and concentrated his attention upon his companion's words, while Haw bent forward his eager, earnest face like a man who knows the value of the words which he is saying.

"You are already aware," he remarked, "that I have devoted a great deal of energy and of time to the study of chemistry."

"So you told me."

"I commenced my studies under a famous English chemist, I continued them under the best man in France, and I completed them in the most celebrated laboratory of Germany. I was not rich, but my father had left me enough to keep me comfortably, and by living economically I had a sum at my command which enabled me to

carry out my studies in a very complete way. When I returned to England I built myself a laboratory in a quiet country place, where I could work without distraction or interruption. There I began a series of investigations which soon took me into regions of science to which none of the three famous men who taught me had ever penetrated.

“You say, Robert, that you have some slight knowledge of chemistry, and you will find it easier to follow what I say. Chemistry is, to a large extent, an empirical science, and the chance experiment may lead to greater results than could, with our present data, be derived from the closest study or the keenest reasoning. The most important chemical discoveries, from the first manufacture of glass to the whitening and refining of sugar, have all been due to some happy chance which might have befallen a mere dabbler as easily as a deep student.

“Well, it was to such a chance that my own great discovery—perhaps the greatest that the world has seen—was due, though I may claim the credit of having originated the line of thought which led up to it. I had frequently speculated as to the effect which powerful currents of electricity exercise upon any substance through which they are poured for a considerable time. I do not here mean such feeble currents as are passed along a telegraph wire, but I mean the very highest possible developments. Well, I tried a series of experiments upon this point. I found that in liquids and in compounds the force had a disintegrating effect. The well-known experiment of the electrolysis of water will of course occur to you. But I found that in the case of elemental solids the effect was a remarkable one. The element slowly decreased in weight, without perceptibly

altering in composition. I hope that I make myself clear to you."

"I follow you entirely," said Robert, deeply interested in his companion's narrative.

"I tried upon several elements, and always with the same result. In every case an hour's current would produce a perceptible loss of weight. My theory at that stage was that there was a loosening of the molecules caused by the electric fluid, and that a certain number of these molecules were shed off like an impalpable dust all round the lump of earth or of metal, which remained of course the lighter by their loss. I had entirely accepted this theory when a very remarkable chance led me to completely alter my opinions.

"I had, one Saturday night, fastened a bar of bismuth in a clamp, and had attached it on either side to an electric wire in order to observe what effect the current would have upon it. I had been testing each metal in turn, exposing them to the influence for from one to two hours. I had just got everything in position and had completed my connection, when I received a telegram to say that John Stillingfleet, an old chemist in London with whom I had been on terms of intimacy, was dangerously ill, and had expressed a wish to see me. The last train was due to leave in twenty minutes, and I lived a good mile from the station. I thrust a few things into a bag, locked my laboratory, and ran as hard as I could to catch it.

"It was not until I was in London that it suddenly occurred to me that I had neglected to shut off the current, and that it would continue to pass through the bar of bismuth until the batteries were exhausted. The fact however seemed to be of small importance, and I dismissed it from my mind. I was detained in London

until the Tuesday night, and it was Wednesday morning before I got back to my work. As I unlocked the laboratory door my mind reverted to the uncompleted experiment, and it struck me that in all probability my piece of bismuth would have been entirely disintegrated and reduced to its primitive molecules. I was utterly unprepared for the truth.

“When I approached the table I found, sure enough, that the bar of metal had vanished, and that the clamp was empty. Having noted the fact I was about to turn away to something else, when my attention was attracted to the fact that the table upon which the clamp stood was all starred over with little patches of some liquid silvery matter which lay in single drops or coalesced into little pools. I had a very distinct recollection of having thoroughly cleared the table before beginning my experiment, so that this substance had been deposited there since I had left for London. Much interested, I very carefully collected it all into one vessel and examined it minutely. There could be no question as to what it was. It was the purest mercury, and gave no response to any test for bismuth.

“I at once grasped the fact that chance had placed in my hands a chemical discovery of the very first importance. If bismuth were, under certain conditions, to be subjected to the action of electricity, it would begin by losing weight, and would finally be transformed into mercury. I had broken down the partition which separated two elements.

“But the process would be a constant one. It would presumably prove to be a general law, and not an isolated fact. If bismuth turned into mercury, what would mercury turn into? There would be no rest for me until I had solved the question. I renewed the ex-

hausted batteries and passed the current through the bowl of quicksilver. For sixteen hours I sat watching the metal, marking how it slowly seemed to curdle, to grow firmer, to lose its silvery glitter, and to take a dull yellow hue. When I at last picked it up in a forceps and threw it upon the table, it had lost every characteristic of mercury, and had obviously become another metal. A few simple tests were enough to show me that this other metal was platinum.

"Now, to a chemist there was something very suggestive in the order in which these changes had been effected. Perhaps you can see the relation, Robert, which they bear to each other?"

"No, I cannot say that I do." Robert had sat listening to this strange statement with parted lips and staring eyes.

"I will show you. Bismuth is the heaviest of the metals. Its atomic weight is 210. The next in weight is lead, 207, and then comes mercury, at 200. Possibly the long period during which the current had acted in my absence had reduced the bismuth to lead, and the lead in turn to mercury. Now, platinum stands at 197.5, and it was accordingly the next metal to be produced by the continued current. Do you see, now?"

"It is quite clear."

"And then there came the inference, which sent my heart into my mouth and caused my head to swim round. Gold is the next in the series. Its atomic weight is 197. I remembered now, and for the first time understood, why it was that it was always lead and mercury which were mentioned by the old alchemists as being the two metals which might be used in their calling. With fingers which trembled with excitement I adjusted the

wires again, and in little more than an hour—for the length of the process was always in proportion to the difference in the metals—I had before me a knob of ruddy crinkled metal which answered to every reaction for gold.

“Well, Robert, this is a long story, but I think that you will agree with me that its importance justifies me in going into detail. When I had satisfied myself that I had really manufactured gold, I cut the nugget in two. One-half I sent to a jeweller and worker in precious metals with whom I had some slight acquaintance, asking him to report upon the quality of the metal. With the other half I continued my series of experiments, and reduced it in successive stages through all the long series of metals, through silver and zinc and manganese, until I had brought it to lithium, which is the lightest of all.”

“And what did it turn to then?” asked Robert.

“Then came what to chemists is likely to be the most interesting portion of my discovery. It turned to a grayish fine powder, which powder gave no further results however much I might treat it with electricity. And that powder is the base of all things, it is the mother of all the elements, it is in short the substance whose existence has been recently surmised by a leading chemist, and which has been christened protyle by him. I am the discoverer of the great law of the electrical transposition of the metals, and I am the first to demonstrate protyle; so that, I think, Robert, that if all my schemes in other directions come to nothing, my name is at least likely to live in the chemical world.

“There is not very much more for me to tell you. I had my nugget back from my friend the jeweller, con-

firming my opinion as to its nature and its quality. I soon found several methods by which the process might be simplified, and especially a modification of the ordinary electric current, which was very much more effective. Having made a certain amount of gold, I disposed of it for a sum which enabled me to buy improved materials and stronger batteries. In this way I enlarged my operations, until at last I was in a position to build this house and to have a laboratory where I could carry out my work on a much larger scale. As I said before, I can now state with all truth that the amount of my income is only limited by my desires."

"It is wonderful!" gasped Robert. "It is like a fairy tale. But with this great discovery in your mind, you must have been sorely tempted to confide it to others."

"I thought well over it. I gave it every consideration. It was obvious to me that if my invention were made public, its immediate result would be to deprive the present precious metals of all their special value. Some other substance, amber, we will say, or ivory, would be chosen as a medium for barter, and gold would be inferior in value to brass, as being heavier and yet not so hard. No one would be the better for such a consummation as that. Now, if I retained my secret, and used it with wisdom, I might make myself the greatest benefactor to mankind that has ever lived. Those were the chief reasons, and I trust that they are not dishonorable ones, which led me to form the resolution which I have to-day for the first time broken."

"But your secret is safe with me," cried Robert. "My lips shall be sealed until I have your permission to speak."

"If I had not known that I could trust you, I should have withheld it from your knowledge. And now, my

dear Robert, theory is very weary work, and practice is infinitely more interesting. I have given you more than enough of the first. If you will be good enough to accompany me to the laboratory, I shall give you a little of the latter."



CHAPTER XI.

A CHEMICAL DEMONSTRATION.

Raffles Haw led the way through the front door, and crossing over the gravelled drive, pushed open the outer door of the laboratory—the same through which the McIntyres had seen the packages conveyed from the wagon. On passing through it Robert found that they were not really within the building, but merely in a large bare antechamber, around the walls of which were stacked the very objects which had aroused his curiosity and his father's speculations. All mystery had gone from them now, however, for while some were still wrapped in their sackcloth coverings, others had been undone and revealed themselves as great pigs of lead.

“There is my raw material,” said Raffles Haw, carelessly, nodding at the heap. “Every Saturday I have a wagon load sent up, which serves me for a week, but we shall need to work double-tides when Laura and I are married, and we get our great schemes under weigh. I have to be very careful about the quality of the lead, for of course every impurity is reproduced in the gold.”

A heavy iron door led into the inner chamber. Haw unlocked it, but only to disclose a second one about five feet further on.

“This flooring is all disconnected at night,” he remarked; “I have no doubt that there is a good deal of gossip in the servants’ hall about this sealed chamber,

so I have to guard myself against some inquisitive ostler or too adventurous butler."

The inner door admitted them into the laboratory, a high, bare, whitewashed room, with a glass roof. At one end was the furnace and boiler, the iron mouth of which was closed, though the fierce red light beat through the cracks and a dull roar sounded through the building. On either side innumerable huge Leyden-jars stood ranged in rows, tier topping tier, while above them were columns of voltaic cells. Robert's eyes, as he glanced around, lit on vast wheels, complicated networks of wire, stands, test-tubes, colored bottles, graduated glasses, Bunsen burners, porcelain insulators, and all the varied débris of a chemical and electrical work-shop.

"Come across here," said Raffles Haw, picking his way among the heaps of metal, the coke, the packing-cases, and the carboys of acid. "Yours is the first foot except my own which has ever penetrated to this room since the workmen left it. My servants carry the lead into the anteroom, but come no further. The furnace can be cleaned and stoked from without. I employ a fellow to do nothing else. Now take a look in here."

He threw open a door on the further side, and motioned to the young artist to enter. The latter stood silent with one foot over the threshold, staring in amazement around him. The room, which may have been some thirty feet square, was paved and walled with gold. Great brick-shaped ingots, closely packed, covered the whole floor, while on every side they were reared up in compact barriers to the very ceiling. The single electric lamp which lighted the windowless chamber struck a dull, murky, yellow light from the vast piles of precious metal, and gleamed ruddily upon the golden floor.

"This is my treasure-house," remarked the owner

"You see that I have rather an accumulation just now. My imports have been exceeding my exports. You can understand that I have other and more important duties, even than the making of gold, just now. This is where I store my output until I am ready to send it off. Every night almost I am in the habit of sending a case of it to London. I employ seventeen brokers in its sale. Each thinks that he is the only one, and each is dying to know where I can get such large quantities of virgin gold. They say that it is the purest which comes into the market. The popular theory is, I believe, that I am a middleman acting on behalf of some new South African mine which wishes to keep its whereabouts a secret. What value would you put upon the gold in this chamber? It ought to be worth something, for it represents nearly a week's work."

"Something fabulous, I have no doubt," said Robert, glancing round at the yellow barriers. "Shall I say a hundred and fifty thousand pounds?"

"Oh, dear me, it is surely worth very much more than that," cried Raffles Haw, laughing; "let me see. Suppose that we put it at three-ten an ounce, which is nearly ten shillings under the mark. That makes, roughly, fifty-six pounds for a pound in weight. Now, each of these ingots weighs thirty-six pounds, which brings their value to two thousand and a few odd pounds. There are five hundred ingots on each of these three sides of the room, but on the fourth there are only three hundred on account of the door; but there cannot be less than two hundred on the floor, which gives us a rough total of two thousand ingots. So you see, my dear boy, that any broker who could get the contents of this chamber for four million pounds would be doing a nice little stroke of business."

"And a week's work!" gasped Robert. "It makes my head swim."

"You will follow me now when I repeat that none of the great schemes which I intend to simultaneously set in motion are at all likely to languish for want of funds. Now come into the laboratory with me, and see how it is done."

In the centre of the work-room was an instrument like a huge vise, with two large brass-colored plates, and a great steel screw for bringing them together. Numerous wires ran into these metal plates, and were attached at the other end to the rows of dynamic machines. Beneath was a glass stand, which was hollowed out in the centre into a succession of troughs.

"You will soon understand all about it," said Raffles Haw, throwing off his coat and pulling on a smoke-stained and dirty linen jacket. "We must first stoke up a little." He put his weight on a pair of great bellows, and an answering roar came from the furnace. "That will do. The more heat the more electric force, and the quicker our task. Now for the lead! Just give me a hand in carrying it." They lifted a dozen of the pigs of lead from the floor onto the glass stand, and having adjusted the plates on either side, Haw screwed up the handle so as to hold them in position.

"It used in the early days to be a slow process," he remarked, "but now that I have immense facilities for my work it takes a very short time. I have now only to complete the connection in order to begin."

He took hold of a long glass lever which projected from among the wires and drew it downward. A sharp click was heard, followed by a loud sparkling, crackling noise. Great spurts of flame sprang from the two electrodes, and the mass of lead was surrounded by an aure-

ole of golden sparks which hissed and snapped like pistol-shots. The air was filled with the peculiar acid smell of ozone.

"The power there is immense," said Raffles Haw, superintending the process, with his watch upon the palm of his hand. "It would reduce an organic substance to protyle instantly. It is well to understand the mechanism thoroughly, for any mistake might be a grave matter for the operator. You are dealing with gigantic forces. But, you perceive, that the lead is already beginning to turn."

Silvery dew-like drops had indeed begun to form upon the dull-colored mass, and to drop with a tinkle and splash into the glass troughs. Slowly the lead melted away, like an icicle in the sun, the electrodes ever closing upon it as it contracted, until they came together in the centre, and a row of pools of quicksilver had taken the place of the solid metal. Two smaller electrodes were plunged into the mercury, which gradually curdled and solidified, until it had resumed the solid form, with a yellowish brassy shimmer.

"What lies in the moulds now is platinum," remarked Raffles Haw. "We must take it from the troughs and refix it in the large electrodes—so. Now we turn on the current again. You see that it gradually takes a darker and richer tint. Now I think it is perfect." He drew up the lever, removed the electrodes, and there lay a dozen bricks of ruddy, sparkling gold.

"You see, according to our calculation, our morning's work has been worth twenty-four thousand pounds, and it has not taken us more than twenty minutes," remarked the alchemist as he picked up the newly-made ingots, one after the other, and threw them down among the others.

"We will devote one of them to experiment," said he, leaving the last standing upon the glass insulator. "To the world it would seem an expensive demonstration which cost two thousand pounds, but our standard, you see, is a different one. Now you will see me run through the whole gamut of metallic nature."

First of all men after the discoverer, Robert saw the gold mass, when the electrodes were again applied to it, change swiftly and successively to barium, to tin, to silver, to copper, to iron. He saw the long white electric sparks change to crimson with the strontium, to purple with the potassium, to yellow with the manganese. Then, finally, after a hundred transformations, it disintegrated before his eyes, and lay as a little mound of fluffy gray dust upon the glass table.

"And this is protyle," said Haw, passing his fingers through it. "The chemist of the future may resolve it into further constituents, but to me it is the Ultima Thule."

"And now, Robert," he continued, after a pause, "I have shown you enough to enable you to understand something of my system. This is the great secret. It is the secret which endows the man who knows it with such an universal power as no man has ever enjoyed since the world was made. This secret it is the dearest wish of my heart to use for good, and I swear to you, Robert McIntyre, that if I thought it would tend to anything but good, I would have done with it forever. No, I would neither use it myself nor would any other man learn it from my lips. I swear it by all that is holy and solemn." His eyes flashed as he spoke, and his voice quivered with emotion. Standing, pale and lanky, amid his electrodes and his retorts, there was still something majestic about this man, who, amid all his stu-

pendous good-fortune, could still keep his moral sense undazzled by the glitter of his gold. Robert's weak nature had never before realized the strength which lay in those thin, firm lips and earnest eyes.

"Surely in your hands, Mr. Haw, nothing but good shall come of it," he said.

"I hope not, I pray not—most earnestly do I pray not. I have done for you, Robert, what I might not have done for my own brother had I one, and I have done it because I believe and hope that you are a man who would not use this power, should you inherit it, for selfish ends. But even now I have not told you all. There is one link which I have withheld from you, and which shall be withheld from you while I live. But look at this chest, Robert ;" he led him to a great iron-clamped chest which stood in the corner, and throwing it open, he took from it a small case of carved ivory.

"Inside this," he said, "I have left a paper which makes clear anything which is still hidden from you. Should anything happen to me, you will always be able to inherit my powers and to continue my plans, by following the directions which are there expressed. And now," he continued, throwing his casket back again into the box, "I shall frequently require your help, but I do not think that it will be necessary this morning. I have already taken up too much of your time. If you are going back to Elmdene, I wish that you would tell Laura that I shall be with her in the afternoon."

CHAPTER XII.

A FAMILY JAR.

And so the great secret was out, and Robert walked home with his head in a whirl, and the blood tingling in his veins. He had shivered as he came up at the damp cold of the wind and the sight of the mist-mottled landscape. That was all gone now. His own thoughts tinged everything with sunshine, and he felt inclined to sing and dance as he walked down the muddy, deeply-rutted country-lane. Wonderful had been the fate allotted to Raffles Haw, but surely hardly less important that which had come upon himself. He was the sharer of the alchemist's secret, and the heir to an inheritance which combined a wealth greater than that of monarchs, to a freedom such as monarchs cannot enjoy. This was a destiny indeed! A thousand gold-tinted visions of his future life rose up before him, and in fancy he already sat high above the human race, with prostrate thousands imploring his aid, or thanking him for his benevolence.

How sordid seemed the untidy garden with its scraggy bushes and gaunt elm-trees! How mean the plain buck front with the green wooden porch! It had always offended his artistic sense, but now it was obtrusive in its ugliness. The plain room, too, with the American leather chairs, the dull-colored carpet, and the patch-work rug, he felt a loathing for it all. The only pretty thing in it, upon which his eyes could rest with satisfaction, was his sister as she leaned back in her chair

by the fire, with her white, clear, beautiful face outlined against the dark background.

"Do you know, Robert," she said, glancing up at him from under her long black lashes, "papa grows unendurable. I have had to speak very plainly to him, and to make him understand that I am marrying for my own benefit and not for his."

"Where is he, then?"

"I don't know. At the Three Pigeons, no doubt. He spends most of his time there now. He flew off in a passion, and talked such nonsense about marriage settlements and forbidding the banns, and so on. His notion of a marriage settlement appears to be a settlement upon the bride's father. He should wait quietly, and see what can be done for him."

"I think, Laura, that we must make a good deal of allowance for him," said Robert, earnestly. "I have noticed a great change in him lately. I don't think he is himself at all. I must get some medical advice. But I have been up at the hall this morning."

"Have you? Have you seen Raffles? Did he send anything for me?"

"He said that he would come down when he had finished his work."

"But what is the matter, Robert?" cried Laura, with the swift perception of womanhood. "You are flushed, and your eyes are shining, and really you look quite handsome. Raffles has been telling you something? What was it? Oh, I know, he has been telling you how he made his money. Hasn't he, now?"

"Well, yes. He took me partly into his confidence. I congratulate you, Laura, with all my heart, for you will be a very wealthy woman."

"How strange it seems, that he should have come

to us in our poverty. It is all owing to you, you dear old Robert, for if he had not taken a fancy to you, he would never have come down to Elmdene and taken a fancy to someone else."

"Not at all," Robert answered, sitting down by his sister, and patting her hand affectionately. "It was a clear case of love at first sight. He was in love with you before he ever knew your name. He asked me about you the very first time I saw him."

"But tell me about his money, Bob," said his sister. "He has not told me yet, and I am so curious. How did he make it? It was not from his father; he told me that himself. His father was just a country doctor. How did he do it?"

"I am bound over to secrecy. He will tell you himself."

"Oh, but only tell me if I guess right. He had it left him by an uncle—eh? Well, by a friend? or he took out some wonderful patent? or he discovered a mine? or oil? Do tell me, Robert!"

"I mustn't really," cried her brother, laughing. "And I must not talk to you any more. You are much too sharp. I feel a responsibility about it. And, besides, I must really do some work."

"It is very unkind of you," said Laura, pouting. "But I must put my things on, for I go into Birmingham by the one-twenty."

"To Birmingham!"

"Yes, I have a hundred things to order. There is everything to be got. You men forget about these details. Raffles wishes to have the wedding in little more than a fortnight. Of course it will be very quiet, but still one needs something."

"So early as that!" said Robert, thoughtfully. "Well, perhaps it is better so!"

"Much better, Robert. Would it not be dreadful if Hector came back first and there was a scene. If I were once married I should not mind. Why should I? But of course Raffles knows nothing about him, and it would be terrible if they came together."

"That must be avoided at any cost."

"Oh, I cannot bear even to think of it. Poor Hector! And yet what could I do? Robert, you know that it was only a boy and girl affair. And how could I refuse such an offer as this. It was a duty to my family, was it not?"

"You were placed in a difficult position—very difficult," her brother answered. "But all will be right, and I have no doubt Hector will see it as you do. But does Mr. Spurling know of your engagement?"

"Not a word. He was here yesterday, and talked of Hector, but really I did not know how to tell him. We are to be married by special license in Birmingham, so really there is no reason why he should know. But now I must hurry, or I shall miss my train."

When his sister was gone Robert went up to his studio, and having ground some colors upon his palette he stood for some time, brush and marlstick in hand, in front of his big bare canvas. But how profitless all his work seemed to him now! What object had he in doing it? Was it to earn money? Money could be had for the asking, or for that matter, without the asking. Or was it to produce a thing of beauty? But he had artistic faults. Raffles Haw had said so, and he knew that he was right. After all his pains the thing might not please. And with money he could at all times buy pictures which would please and which would be things of beauty. What, then, was the object of his working? He could see none. He threw down

his brush, and lighting his pipe, he strolled downstairs once more.

His father was standing in front of the fire, and in no very good humor, as his red face and puckered eyes sufficed to show.

"Well, Robert," he began, "I suppose that as usual you have spent your morning plotting against your father?"

"What do you mean, father?"

"I mean what I say. What is it but plotting when three folk, you and she and this Raffles Haw, whisper and arrange, and have meetings without a word to me about it. What do I know of your plans?"

"I cannot tell you secrets which are not my own, father."

"But I'll have a voice in the matter, for all that. Secrets or no secrets, you will find that Laura has a father, and that he is not a man to be set aside. I may have had my ups and downs in trade, but I have not quite fallen so low that I am nothing in my own family. What am I to get out of this precious marriage?"

"What should you get? Surely Laura's happiness and welfare is enough for you."

"If this man was really fond of Laura, he would show proper consideration for Laura's father. It was only yesterday that I asked him for a loan, condescended actually to ask for it; I who have been within an ace of being mayor of Birmingham. And he refused me point-blank."

"Oh, father! How could you expose yourself to such a humiliation?"

"Refused me point-blank!" cried the old man, excitedly. "It was against his principles, if you please. But I'll be even with him! You see if I am not. I

know one or two things about him. What is it they call him at the Three Pigeons? A smasher, that's the word—a coiner of false money. Why else should he have this metal sent him, and that great smoky chimney of his going all day?"

"Why can you not leave him alone, father?" expostulated Robert. "You seem to think of nothing but his money. If he had not a penny he would still be a very kind-hearted, pleasant gentleman."

Old McIntyre burst into a hoarse laugh. "I like to hear you preach," said he. "Without a penny, indeed! Do you think that you would dance attendance upon him if he were a poor man? Do you think that Laura would ever have looked twice at him? You know as well as I do that she is marrying him only for his money."

Robert gave a cry of dismay. There was the alchemist standing in the doorway, pale and silent, looking from one to the other of them with his searching eyes.

"I must apologize," he said, coldly; "I did not mean to listen to your words. I could not help it. But I have heard them. As to you, Mr. McIntyre, I believe that you speak from your own bad heart. I will not let myself be moved by your words. In Robert I have a true friend. Laura also loves me for my own sake. You cannot shake my faith in them. But with you, Mr. McIntyre, I have nothing in common, and it is as well perhaps that we should both recognize the fact." He bowed and was gone ere either of the McIntyres could say a word.

"You see!" said Robert, at last; "you have done now what you cannot undo!"

"I will be even with him!" cried the old man, furiously, shaking his fist through the window at the dark slow-pacing figure. "You just wait, Robert, and see if your old dad is a man to be played with."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MIDNIGHT VENTURE.

Not a word was said to Laura when she returned as to the scene which had occurred in her absence. She was in the gayest of spirits and prattled merrily about her purchases and her arrangements, wondering from time to time when Raffles Haw would come. As night fell, however, without any word from him, she became uneasy.

"What can be the matter, that he does not come?" she said. "It is the first day since our engagement that I have not seen him."

Robert looked out through the window. "It is a gusty night, and raining hard," he remarked. "I do not at all expect him."

"Poor Hector used to come, rain, snow, or fine. But then of course he was a sailor. It was nothing to him. I hope that Raffles is not ill."

"He was quite well when I saw him this morning," answered her brother, and they relapsed into silence, while the rain pattered against the windows, and the wind screamed amid the branches of the elms outside.

Old McIntyre had sat in the corner most of the day, biting his nails and glowering into the fire, with a brooding, malignant expression upon his wrinkled features. Contrary to his usual habits, he did not go to the village inn, but shuffled off early to bed without a word to his children. Laura and Robert remained chatting for

some time by the fire, she talking of the thousand and one wonderful things which were to be done when she was mistress of the new hall. There was less philanthropy in her talk when her future husband was absent, and Robert could not but remark that her carriages, her dresses, her receptions, and her travels in distant countries were the topics into which she threw all the enthusiasm which he had formerly heard her bestow upon refuge homes and labor organizations.

"I think that grays are the nicest horses," she said. "Bays are nice, too, but grays are more showy. We could manage with a brougham and a landau, and perhaps a high dog-cart for Raffles. He has the coach-house full at present, but he never uses them, and I am sure that those fifty horses would all die for want of exercise, or get livers like Strasburg geese, if they waited for him to ride or drive them."

"I suppose that you will still live here," said her brother.

"We must have a house in London as well, and run up for the season. I don't of course like to make suggestions now, but it will be different afterward. I am sure that Raffles will do it if I ask him. It is all very well for him to say that he does not want any thanks or honors, but I should like to know what is the use of being a public benefactor if you are to have no return for it. I am sure that if he does only half what he talks of doing, they will make him a peer—Lord Tamfield, perhaps—and then of course I shall be Lady Tamfield, and what would you think of that, Bob?" She dropped him a stately courtesy, and tossed her head in the air, as one who was born to wear a coronet.

"Father must be pensioned off," she remarked, presently. "He shall have so much a year on condition that

he keeps away. As to you, Bob, I don't know what we shall do with you. We shall make you President of the Royal Academy, if money can do it."

It was late before they ceased building their air-castles and retired to their rooms. But Robert's brain was excited and he could not sleep. The events of the day had been enough to shake a stronger man. There had been the revelation of the morning, the strange sights which he had witnessed in the laboratory, and the immense secret which had been confided to his keeping. Then there had been the conversation with his father in the afternoon, their disagreement, and the sudden intrusion of Raffles Haw. Finally, the talk with his sister had excited his imagination and driven sleep from his eyelids. In vain he turned and twisted in his bed, or paced the floor of his chamber. He was not only awake, but abnormally awake, with every nerve highly strung and every sense at the keenest. What was he to do to gain a little sleep? It flashed across him that there was brandy in the decanter downstairs, and that a glass might act as a sedative.

He had opened the door of his room, when suddenly his ear caught the sound of slow and stealthy footsteps upon the stairs. His own lamp was unlit, but a dim glimmer came from a moving taper, and a long black shadow travelled down the wall. He stood motionless, listening intently. The steps were in the hall now, and he heard a gentle creaking as the key was cautiously turned in the door. The next instant there came a gust of cold air, the taper was extinguished, and a sharp snap announced that the door had been closed from without.

Robert stood astonished. Who could this night-wanderer be? It must be his father. But what errand could take him out at three in the morning. And such

a morning, too ! With every blast of the wind the rain beat up against his chamber window as though it would drive it in. The glass rattled in the frames, and the tree outside creaked and groaned as its great branches were tossed about by the gale. What could draw any man forth upon such a night ?

Hurriedly Robert struck a match and lit his lamp. His father's room was opposite to his own, and the door was ajar. He pushed it open and looked about him. It was empty. The bed had not even been laid upon. The single chair stood by the window, and there the old man must have sat since he left them. There was no book, no paper, no means by which he could have amused himself—nothing but a razor-strop lying on the window-sill.

A feeling of impending misfortune struck cold to Robert's heart. There was some ill meaning in this journey of his father's. He thought of his brooding of yesterday, his scowling face, his bitter threats. Yes, there was some mischief underlying it. But perhaps he might even now be in time to prevent it. There was no use calling Laura. She could be no help in the matter. He hurriedly threw on his clothes, muffled himself in his topcoat, and seizing his hat and stick, he set off after his father.

As he came out into the village street the wind whirled down it so that he had to put his ear and shoulder against it, and push his way forward. It was better, however, when he turned into the lane. The high bank and the hedge sheltered him upon one side. The road however was deep in mud, and the rain fell in a steady swish. Not a soul was to be seen, but he needed to make no inquiries, for he knew whither his father had gone as certainly as though he had seen him.

The iron side gate of the avenue was half open, and

Robert stumbled his way up the gravelled drive amid the dripping fir-trees. What could his father's intention be when he reached the hall? Was it merely that he wished to spy and prowl, or did he intend to call up the master and enter into some discussion as to his wrongs? Or was it possible that some blacker and more sinister design lay beneath his strange doings? Robert thought suddenly of the razor strop, and gasped with horror. What had the old man been doing with that? He quickened his pace to a run, and hurried on until he found himself at the door of the hall.

Thank God, all was quiet there. He stood by the big silent door and listened intently. There was nothing to be heard save the wind and the rain. Where, then, could his father be? If he wished to enter the hall he would not attempt to do so by one of the windows, for had he not been present when Raffles Haw had shown them the precautions which he had taken? But then a sudden thought struck Robert. There was one window which was left unguarded. Haw had been imprudent enough to tell them so. It was the middle window of the laboratory. If he remembered it so clearly, of course his father would remember it too. There was the point of danger.

The moment that he had come round the corner of the building he found that his surmise had been correct. An electric lamp burned in the laboratory, and the silver squares of the three large windows stood out clear and bright in the darkness. The centre one had been thrown open, and even as he gazed Robert saw a dark, monkey-like figure spring up onto the sill, and vanish into the room beyond. For a moment only it outlined itself against the brilliant light, but in that moment Robert had time to see that it was indeed his

father. On tiptoe he crossed the intervening space and peeped in through the open window. It was a singular spectacle which met his eyes.

There stood upon the glass table some half-dozen large ingots of gold which had been made the night before, but which had not been removed to the treasure-house. On these the old man had thrown himself as one who enters into his rightful inheritance. He lay across the table, his arms clasping the bars of gold, his cheek pressed against them, crooning and muttering to himself. Under the clear still light, amid the giant wheels and strange engines, that one little dark figure clutching and clinging to the ingots had in it something both weird and piteous.

For five minutes or more Robert stood in the darkness amid the rain, looking in at this strange sight, while his father hardly moved save to cuddle closer to the gold, and to pat it with his thin hands. Robert was still uncertain what he should do, when his eyes wandered from the central figure and fell on something else, which made him give a little cry of astonishment—a cry which was drowned amid the howling of the gale.

Raffles Haw was standing in the corner of the room. Where he had come from Robert could not say, but he was certain that he had not been there when he first looked in. He stood silent, wrapped in some long dark dressing-gown, his arms folded, and a bitter smile upon his pale face. Old McIntyre seemed to see him at almost the same moment, for he shrieked out an oath and clutched still closer at his treasure, looking slantwise at the master of the house with furtive, treacherous eyes.

“And it has really come to this!” said Haw, at last, taking a step forward; “you have actually fallen so low, Mr. McIntyre, as to steal into my house at night

like a common burglar. You knew that this window was unguarded. I remember telling you as much. But I did not tell you what other means I had adopted by which I might be warned if knaves made an entrance. But that *you* should have come! *You!*"

The old gunmaker made no attempt to justify himself, but he muttered some few hoarse words and continued to cling to the treasure.

"I love your daughter," said Raffles Haw, "and for her sake I will not expose you. Your hideous and infamous secret shall be safe with me. No ear shall hear what has happened this night. I will not, as I might, arouse my servants and send for the police. But you must leave my house without further words. I have nothing more to say to you. Go as you have come."

He took a step forward and held out his hand as if to detach the old man's grasp from the golden bars. The other thrust his hand into the breast of his coat and, with a shrill scream of rage, flung himself upon the alchemist. So sudden and so fierce was the movement that Haw had no time for defence. A bony hand gripped him by the throat, and the blade of a razor flashed in the air. Fortunately, as it fell the weapon struck against one of the many wires which spanned the room, and flying out of the old man's grasp, tinkled upon the stone floor. But though disarmed, he was still dangerous. With a horrible, silent energy he pushed Haw back and back until, coming to a bench, they both fell over it, McIntyre remaining uppermost. His second hand was on the alchemist's throat, and it might have fared ill with him had Robert not climbed through the window and dragged his father off from him. With the aid of Haw he pinned the old man down and passed a long cravat around his arms. It was terrible to look at

him, for his face was convulsed, his eyes bulging from his head, and his lips white with foam.

Haw leaned against the glass table panting, with his hand to his side.

"You here, Robert!" he gasped. "Is it not horrible? How did you come?"

"I followed him. I heard him go out."

"He would have robbed me, and he would have murdered me. But he is mad—stark, staring mad."

There could be no doubt of it. Old McIntyre was sitting up now and burst suddenly into a hoarse peal of laughter, rocking himself backward and forward, and looking up at them with little twinkling cunning eyes. It was clear to both of them that his mind, weakened by long brooding over the one idea, had now at last become that of a monomaniac. His horrid, causeless mirth was more terrible even than his fury.

"What shall we do with him?" asked Haw. "We cannot take him back to Elmdene. It would be a terrible shock to Laura."

"We could have doctors to certify in the morning. Could we not keep him here until then? If we take him back someone will meet us, and there will be a scandal."

"I know. We will take him to one of the padded rooms, where he can neither hurt himself nor anyone else. I am somewhat shaken myself. But I am better now. Do you take one arm and I will take the other." Half leading and half dragging him, they managed between them to convey the old gunmaker away from the scene of his disaster, and to lodge him for the night in a place of safety. At five in the morning Robert had started in the gig to make the medical arrangements, while Raffles Haw paced his palatial house with a troubled face and a sad heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPREAD OF THE BLIGHT.

It may be that Laura did not look upon the removal of her father as an unmixed misfortune. Nothing was said to her as to the manner of the old man's seizure, but Robert informed her at breakfast that he had thought it best, acting under medical advice, to place him for a time under some restraint. She had herself frequently remarked upon the growing eccentricity of his manner, so that the announcement could have been no great surprise to her. It is certain that it did not diminish her appetite for the coffee and the scrambled eggs, nor prevent her from chatting a good deal about her approaching wedding.

But it was very different with Raffles Haw. The incident had shocked him to his inmost soul. He had often feared lest his money do indirect evil, but here was crime and madness arising before his very eyes from its influence. In vain he tried to choke down his feelings and to persuade himself that this attack of old McIntyre's was something which came of itself—something which had no connection with himself or his wealth. He remembered the man as he had first met him, garrulous, foolish, but with no obvious vices. He recalled the change which, week by week, had come over him, his greedy eye, his furtive manner, his hints and innuendoes, ending only the day before in a positive demand for money. It was too certain that there was a

chain of events leading direct to the horrible encounter in the laboratory. His money had cast a blight where he had hoped to shed a blessing.

Mr. Spurling, the vicar, was up shortly after breakfast, some rumor of evil having come to his ears. It was good for Haw to talk with him, for the fresh, breezy manner of the old clergyman was a corrective to his own sombre and introspective mood.

"Prut-tut!" said he. "This is very bad—very bad indeed! Mind unhinged, you say, and not likely to get over it? Dear, dear! I have noticed a change in him these last few weeks. He looked like a man who had something upon his mind. And how is Mr. Robert McIntyre?"

"He is very well. He was with me this morning when his father had this attack."

"Ha! There is a change in that young man. I observe an alteration in him. You will forgive me, Mr. Raffles Haw, if I say a few words of advice to you. Apart from my spiritual functions I am old enough to be your father. You are a very wealthy man, and you have used your wealth nobly—yes, sir, nobly. I do not think that there is a man in a thousand who would have done as well. But don't you think sometimes that it has a dangerous influence upon those who are around you?"

"I have sometimes feared so."

"We may pass over old Mr. McIntyre. It would hardly be just, perhaps, to mention him in this connection. But there is Robert! He used to take such an interest in his profession. He was so keen about art. If you met him the first words he said were usually some reference to his plans, or the progress he was making in his latest picture. He was ambitious, pushing, self-re-

liant. Now he does nothing. I know for a fact that it is two months since he put brush to canvas. He has turned from a student into an idler, and, what is worse, I fear into a parasite. You will forgive me for speaking so plainly."

Raffles Haw said nothing, but he threw out his hands with a gesture of pain.

"And then there is something to be said about the country folk," said the vicar. "Your kindness has been perhaps a little indiscriminate there. They don't seem to be as helpful or as self-reliant as they used. There was old Blaxton, whose cow-house roof was blown off the other day. He used to be a man who was full of energy and resource. Three months ago he would have got a ladder and had that roof on again in two days' work. But now he must sit down, and wring his hands, and write letters, because he knew that it would come to your ears, and that you would make it good. There's old Ellary, too! Well, of course, he was always poor, but at least he did something, and so kept himself out of mischief. Not a stroke will he do now, but smokes and talks scandal from morning to night. And the worst of it is, that it not only hurts those who have had your help, but it unsettles those who have not. They all have an injured, surly feeling, as if other folk were getting what they had an equal right to. It has really come to such a pitch that I thought it was a duty to speak to you about it. Well, it is a new experience to me. I have often had to reprove my parishioners for not being charitable enough, but it is very strange to find one who is too charitable. It is a noble error."

"I thank you very much for letting me know about it," answered Raffles Haw, as he shook the good old clergyman's hand. "I shall certainly reconsider my

conduct in that respect." He kept a rigid and unmoved face until his visitor had gone, and then, retiring to his own little room, he threw himself upon the bed and burst out sobbing with his face buried in the pillow. Of all men in England this, the richest, was on that day the most miserable. How could he use this great power which he held? Every blessing which he tried to give turned itself into a curse. His intentions were so good, and yet his results were so terrible. It was as if he had some foul leprosy of the mind which all caught who were exposed to his influence. His charity, so well meant, so carefully bestowed, had yet poisoned the whole countryside. And if in small things his results were so evil, how could he tell that they would be better in the larger plans which he had formed? If he could not pay the debts of a simple yokul without disturbing the great laws of cause and effect which lie at the base of all things, what could he hope for when he came to fill the treasury of nations, to interfere with the complex conditions of trade, or to provide for great masses of the population? He drew back with horror as he dimly saw that vast problems faced him in which he might make errors which all his money could not repair. The way of Providence was the straight way. Yet he, a half-blind creature, must needs push in and strive to alter and correct it. Would he be a benefactor? Might he not rather prove to be the greatest malefactor that the world had seen?

But soon a calmer mood came upon him, and he rose and bathed his flushed face and fevered brow. After all, was there not a field where all were agreed that money might be well spent? It was not the way of nature, but rather the way of man which he would alter. It was not Providence that had ordained that folk should

live, half starved and overcrowded, in dreary slums. That was the result of artificial conditions, and it might well be healed by artificial means. Why should not his plans be successful, after all, and the world the better for his discovery? Then, again, it was not the truth that he cast a blight on those with whom he was brought in contact. There was Laura. Who knew more of him than she did? and yet how good and sweet and true she was. She at least had lost nothing through knowing him. He would go down and see her. It would be soothing to hear her voice and to turn to her for words of sympathy in this hour of darkness.

The storm had died away, but a soft wind was blowing and the smack of the coming spring was in the air. He drew in the aromatic scent of the fir-trees as he passed down the curving drive. Before him lay the long sloping country-side, all dotted over with the farm steadings and little red cottages, with the morning sun striking slantwise upon their gray roofs and glimmering windows. His heart yearned over all these people, with their manifold troubles, their little sordid miseries, their strivings and hopings and petty soul-killing cares. How could he get at them? How could he manage to lift the burden from them and yet not hinder them in their life-aim? For more and more could he see that all refinement is through sorrow, and that the life which does not refine is the life without an aim.

Laura was alone in the sitting-room at Elmdene, for Robert had gone out to make some final arrangements about his father. She sprang up as her lover entered, and ran forward, with a pretty girlish gesture, to greet him.

"Oh, Raffles," she cried, "I knew that you would come! Is it not dreadful about papa?"

"You must not fret, dearest," he answered, gently. "It may not prove to be so very grave after all."

"But it all happened before I was stirring. I knew nothing about it until breakfast-time. They must have gone up to the hall very early?"

"Yes, they did come up rather early."

"What is the matter with you, Raffles?" cried Laura, looking up into his face; "you look so sad and weary!"

"I have been a little in the blues. The fact is, Laura, that I have had a long talk with Mr. Spurling this morning."

The girl started and turned white to the lips. A long talk with Mr. Spurling! Did that mean that he had learned her secret?

"Well!" she gasped.

"He tells me that my charity has done more harm than good, and, in fact, that I have had an evil influence upon everyone whom I have come near. He said it in the most delicate way, but that was really what it amounted to."

"Oh, is that all?" said Laura, with a long sigh of relief. "You must not think of minding what Mr. Spurling says. Why, it is absurd on the face of it. Everybody knows that there are dozens of men all over the country who would have been ruined and turned out of their houses if you had not stood their friend. How could they be the worse for having known you? I wonder that Mr. Spurling can talk such nonsense."

"How is Robert's picture getting on?"

"Oh, he has a lazy fit on him. He has not touched it for ever so long. But why do you ask that? You have that furrow on your brow again. Put it away, sir!" She smoothed it away with her white little hand.

"Well, at any rate I don't think that quite everybody

is the worse," said he, looking down at her. "There is one at least who is beyond taint, one who is good and pure and true, and who would love me as well if I were a poor clerk struggling for a livelihood. You would, would you not, Laura?"

"You foolish boy, of course I should."

"And yet, how strange it is that it should be so—that you, who are the only woman whom I have ever loved, should be the only one in whom I also have raised an affection which is free from greed or interest. I wonder whether you may not have been sent by Providence simply to restore my confidence in the world. How barren a place would it not be if it were not for woman's love. When all seemed black around me this morning, I tell you, Laura, that I seemed to turn to you and to your love as the one thing on earth upon which I could rely. All else seemed shifting, unstable, influenced by this or that base consideration. In you, and you only, could I trust."

"And I in you, dear Raffles! I never knew what love was until I met you."

She took a step toward him, her hands advanced, love shining in her features, when in an instant Raffles saw the color struck from her face and a staring horror spring into her eyes. Her blanched and rigid face was turned toward the open door, while he, standing partly behind it, could not see what it was that had so moved her.

"Hector!" she gasped with dry lips.

A quick step in the hall and a slim, weather-tanned young man sprang forward into the room and caught her up in his arms as if she had been a feather. "You darling!" he said. "I knew that I would surprise you. I came right up from Plymouth by the night train.

And I have long leave and plenty of time to get married. Isn't it jolly, dear Laura?" He pirouetted round with her in the exuberance of his delight. As he spun round, however, his eyes fell suddenly upon the pale and silent stranger who stood by the door. Hector blushed furiously, and made an awkward sailor bow, standing with Laura's cold and unresponsive hand still clasped in his.

"Very sorry, sir; didn't see you," he said. "You'll excuse my going on in this mad sort of way, but if you had served you would know what it is to get away from quarter-deck manners and to be a free man. Miss McIntyre will tell you that we have known each other since we were children, and as we are to be married in, I hope, a month at the latest, we understand each other pretty well."

Raffles Haw still stood cold and motionless. He was stunned, benumbed, by what he saw and heard. Laura drew away from Hector and tried to free her hand from his grasp.

"Didn't you get my letter at Gibraltar?" she asked.

"I never went to Gibraltar. Were ordered home by wire from Madeira. Those chaps at the Admiralty never know their own minds for two hours together. But what matter about a letter, Laura, so long as I can see you and speak with you? You have not introduced me to your friend here."

"One word, sir," cried Raffles Haw, in a quivering voice. "Do I entirely understand you? Let me be sure that there is no mistake. You say that you are engaged to be married to Miss McIntyre?"

"Of course I am. I've just come back from a four months' cruise, and I am going to be married before I drag my anchor again."

"Four months!" gasped Haw. "Why, it is just four months since I came here. And one last question, sir. Does Robert McIntyre know of your engagement?"

"Does Bob know? Of course he knows. Why, it was to his care I left Laura when I started. But what is the meaning of all this? What is the matter with you, Laura? Why are you so white and silent? And—hullo, hold up, sir! The man is fainting!"

"It is all right!" gasped Haw, steadying himself against the edge of the door. He was as white as paper, and his hand was pressed close to his side, as though some sudden pain had shot through him. For a moment he tottered there like a stricken man, and then, with a hoarse cry, he turned and fled out through the open door.

"Poor devil!" said Hector, gazing in amazement after him. "He seems hard hit anyhow. But what is the meaning of all this, Laura?" His face had darkened and his mouth had set.

She had not said a word, but had stood, with a face like a mask, looking blankly in front of her. Now she tore herself away from him, and casting herself down, with her face buried in the cushion of the sofa, she burst into a passion of sobbing.

"It means that you have ruined me," she cried. "That you have ruined—ruined—ruined me! Could you not leave us alone! Why must you come at the last moment! A few more days and we were safe. And you never had my letter?"

"And what was in your letter, then?" he asked, coldly, standing, with his arms folded, looking down at her.

"It was to tell you that I released you. I love Raf-

fles Haw and I was to have been his wife. And now it is all gone. Oh, Hector, I hate you, and I shall always hate you as long as I live, for you have stepped between me and the only good-fortune that ever came to me. Leave me alone, and I hope that you will never cross our threshold again."

"Is that your last word, Laura?"

"The last that I shall ever speak to you."

"Then good-by. I shall see Dad, and go straight back to Plymouth." He waited an instant in hopes of an answer, and then walked sadly from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREATER SECRET.

It was late that night that a startled knocking came at the door of Elmdene. Laura had been in her room all day, and Robert was moodily smoking his pipe by the fire when this harsh and sudden summons broke in upon his thoughts. There in the porch was Jones, the stout head butler of the hall, hatless, scared, with the rain-drops shining in the lamp-light upon his smooth bald head.

"If you please, Mr. McIntyre, sir, would it trouble you to step up to the hall?" he cried. "We are all frightened, sir, about master."

Robert caught up his hat and started at a run, the frightened butler trotting heavily beside him. It had been a day of excitement and disaster. The young artist's heart was heavy within him, and the shadow of some crowning trouble seemed to have fallen upon his soul. "What is the matter with your master, then?" he asked, as he slowed down into a walk.

"We don't know, sir, but we can't get an answer when we knock at the laboratory door. Yet he's there, for it's locked on the inside. It has given us all a scare, sir, that and his goin's on during the day."

"His goings on?"

"Yes, sir, for he came back this morning, like a man demented, a-talkin' to himself and with his eyes starin'

so that it was dreadful to look at the poor dear gentleman. Then he walked about the passages a long time, and he wouldn't so much as look at his luncheon, but he went into the museum and gathered all his jewels and things and carried them into the laboratory. We don't know what he's done since then, sir, but his furnace has been a-roarin', and his big chimney spoutin' smoke like a Birmingham factory. When night came we could see his figure against the light a-workin' and a-heavin' like a man possessed. No dinner would he have, but work and work and work. Now it's all quiet, and the furnace cold, and no smoke from above, but we can't get no answer from him, sir, so we were scared, and Miller has gone for the police, and I came away for you."

They reached the hall as the butler finished his explanation, and there outside the laboratory door were the little knot of footmen and hostlers, while the village policeman, who had just arrived, was holding his bull's-eye to the keyhole and endeavoring to peep through.

"The key is half turned," he said. "I can't see nothing except just the light."

"Here's Mr. McIntyre," cried half a dozen voices, as Robert came forward.

"We'll have to beat the door in, sir," said the policeman; "we can't get any sort of answer, and there's something wrong."

Twice and thrice they threw their united weights against it, until at last, with a sharp snap, the lock broke and they crowded into the narrow passage. The inner door was ajar and the laboratory lay before them.

In the centre was an enormous heap of fluffy gray ash, reaching up half way to the ceiling. Beside it was

another heap, much smaller, of some brilliant scintillating dust which shimmered brightly in the rays of the electric light. All round was a bewildering chaos of broken jars, shattered bottles, cracked machinery, and tangled wires, all bent and dragged. And there, in the midst of this universal ruin, leaning back in his chair, with his hands clasped upon his lap, and the easy pose of one who rests after hard work safely carried through, sat Raffles Haw, the master of the house, and the richest of mankind, with the pallor of death upon his face. So easily he sat and so naturally, with such a serene expression upon his features, that it was not until they raised him, and touched his cold and rigid limbs, that they could realize that he had indeed passed away.

Reverently and slowly they bore him to his room, for he was beloved by all who had served him. Robert alone lingered with the policeman in the laboratory. Like a man in a dream he wandered about, marvelling at the universal destruction. A large broad-headed hammer lay upon the ground, and with this Haw had apparently set himself to destroy all his apparatus, having first used his electric machines to reduce to protyle all the stock of gold which he had accumulated. The treasure-room, which had so dazzled Robert, consisted now of merely four bare walls, while the gleaming dust upon the floor proclaimed the fate of that magnificent collection of gems which had alone amounted to a royal fortune. Of all the machinery no single piece remained intact, and even the glass table was shattered into three pieces. Strenuously earnest must have been the work which Raffles Haw had done that day.

And suddenly Robert thought of the secret which had been treasured in the casket within the iron-clamped box. It was to tell him the one last essential link which

would make his knowledge of the process complete. Was it still there? Thrilling all over he opened the great chest and drew out the ivory box. It was locked, but the key was in it. He turned it and threw open the lid. There was a white slip of paper with his own name written upon it. With trembling fingers he unfolded it. Was he the heir to the riches of El Dorado, or was he destined to be a poor, struggling artist? The note was dated that very evening, and ran in this way :

“MY DEAR ROBERT : My secret shall never be used again. I cannot tell you how I thank heaven that I did not entirely confide it to you, for I should have been handing over to you an inheritance of misery, both to yourself and others. For myself I have hardly had a happy moment since I discovered it. This I could have borne had I been able to feel that I was doing good ; but alas ! the only effect of my attempts has been to turn workers into idlers, contented men into greedy parasites, and, worst of all, true, pure women into deceivers and hypocrites. If this is the effect of my interference in a small scale, I cannot hope for anything better were I to carry out the plans which we have so often discussed. The schemes of my life have all turned to nothing. For myself you shall never see me again. I shall go back to the student-life from which I emerged. There, at least, if I can do little good, I can do no harm. It is my wish that such valuables as remain in the hall should be sold and the proceeds divided amongst all the charities of Birmingham. I shall leave to-night if I am well enough, but I have been much troubled all day by a stabbing pain in my side. It is as if wealth were as bad for health as it is for peace of mind. Good-by, Robert,

and may you never have as sad a heart as I have to-night.

“Yours very truly,

“RAFFLES HAW.”

“Was it suicide, sir?—was it suicide?” broke in the policeman, as Robert put the note in his pocket.

“No,” he answered; “I think it was a broken heart.”

And so the wonders of the new hall were all dismantled—the carvings and the gold, the books and the pictures—and many a struggling man or woman who had heard nothing of Raffles Haw during his life had cause to bless him after his death. The house has been bought by a company who have turned it into a hydropathic establishment, and of all the folk who frequent it in search of health or of pleasure, there are few who know the strange story which is connected with it.

The blight which Haw's wealth cast around it seemed to last even after his death. Old McIntyre still raves in the county asylum, and treasures up old scraps of wood and metal under the impression that they are all ingots of gold. Robert McIntyre is a moody and irritable man, forever pursuing a quest which will always evade him. His art is forgotten, and he spends his whole small income upon chemical and electrical appliances, with which he vainly seeks to rediscover that one hidden link. His sister keeps house for him—a silent and brooding woman, still queenly and beautiful, but of a bitter, dissatisfied mind. Of late, however, she has devoted herself to charity, and has been of so much help to Mr. Spurling's new curate that it is thought he may be tempted to secure her assistance forever.

So runs the gossip of the village, and in small places such gossip is seldom wrong. As for Hector Spurling, he is still in Her Majesty's service, and seems inclined to abide by his father's wise advice, that he should not think of marrying until he is a commander. It is possible that of all who were brought within the spell of Raffles Haw he was the only one who had occasion to bless it.

THE END.

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE.

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE.

I HAD called upon my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one day in the autumn of last year, and found him in deep conversation with a very stout, florid-faced elderly gentleman, with fiery red hair. With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw, when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson," he said, cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair, and gave a bob of greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small, fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his arm-chair, and putting his finger-tips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if

you will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we went into the very simple problem presented by Miss Mary Sutherland, that for strange effects and extraordinary combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more daring than any effort of the imagination."

"A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting."

"You did, Doctor, but none the less you must come round to my view, for otherwise I shall keep on piling fact upon fact on you, until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to be right. Now, Mr. Jabez Wilson here has been good enough to call upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which promises to be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some time. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most unique things are very often connected not with the larger but with the smaller crimes, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I have heard, it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to recommence your narrative. I ask you, not merely because my friend, Dr. Watson, has not heard the opening part, but also because the peculiar nature of the story makes me anxious to have every possible detail from your lips. As a rule, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events I am able to guide myself by the thousands of other sim-

ilar cases which occur to my memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some little pride, and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the advertisement column, with his head thrust forward, and the paper flattened out upon his knee, I took a good look at the man, and endeavored, after the fashion of my companion, to read the indications which might be presented by his dress or appearance.

I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy gray shepherd's check trousers, a not overclean black frock-coat, unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes's quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances. "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labor, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

"How, in the name of good fortune, did you know all

that, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did manual labor. It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it and the muscles are more developed."

"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc and compass breastpin."

"Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?"

"What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk."

"Well, but China?"

"The fish which you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks, and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."

Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. "Well, I never!" said he. "I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it after all."

"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake in explaining. 'Omne ignotum pro magnifico,' you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, I have got it now," he answered, with his thick, red finger planted half-way down the column. "Here it

is. This is what began it all. You just read it for yourself, sir."

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

"TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE: On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pa., U. S. A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of four pounds a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and above the age of twenty-one years are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated, after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. "And now, Mr. Wilson, off you go at scratch, and tell us all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note, Doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is *The Morning Chronicle* of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson."

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead, "I have a small pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but that

he is willing to come for half wages, so as to learn the business."

"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself, and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employee who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. "Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault; but, on the whole, he's a good worker. There's no vice in him."

"He is still with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple cooking, and keeps the place clean—that's all I have in the house, for I am a widower, and never had any family. We live very quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads, and pay our debts, if we do nothing more."

"The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

"'I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'

“ ‘Why that ?’ I asks.

“ ‘Why,’ says he, ‘here’s another vacancy on the League of the Red-headed Men. It’s worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits’ end what to do with the money. If my hair would only change color here’s a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.’

“ ‘Why, what is it, then ?’ I asked. You see, Mr. Holmes, I am a very stay-at-home man, and, as my business came to me instead of my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting my foot over the door-mat. In that way I didn’t know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

“ ‘Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men ?’ he asked, with his eyes open.

“ ‘Never.’

“ ‘Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.’

“ ‘And what are they worth ?’ I asked.

“ ‘Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere very much with one’s other occupations.’

“ ‘Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears, for the business has not been over good for some years, and an extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.

“ ‘Tell me all about it,’ said I.

“ ‘Well,’ said he, showing me the advertisement, ‘you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-

headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men ; so, when he died, it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that color. From all I hear it is splendid pay, and very little to do.'

" 'But,' said I, 'there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.'

" 'Not so many as you might think,' he answered. 'You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use your applying if your hair is light red, or dark red, or anything but real, bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr. Wilson, you would just walk in ; but perhaps it would hardly be worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred pounds.'

" Now, it is a fact, gentlemen, as you may see for yourselves, that my hair is of a very full and rich tint, so that it seemed to me that, if there was to be any competition in the matter, I stood as good a chance as any man that I had ever met. Vincent Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I thought he might prove useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for the day, and to come right away with me. He was very willing to have a holiday, so we shut the business up, and started off for the address that was given us in the advertisement.

" I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. From north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in his hair had tramped into the City to answer the advertisement. Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope's Court looked like a coster's orange barrow. I should not have thought

there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. Every shade of color they were—straw, lemon, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay; but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the real vivid flame-colored tint. When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and pulled and butted until he got me through the crowd, and right up to the steps which led to the office. There was a double stream upon the stair, some going up in hope, and some coming back dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could, and soon found ourselves in the office.”

“Your experience has been a most entertaining one,” remarked Holmes, as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. “Pray continue your very interesting statement.”

“There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs and a deal table, behind which sat a small man, with a head that was even redder than mine. He said a few words to each candidate as he came up, and then he always managed to find some fault in them which would disqualify them. Getting a vacancy did not seem to be such a very easy matter after all. However, when our turn came, the little man was much more favorable to me than to any of the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he might have a private word with us.

“‘This is Mr. Jabez Wilson,’ said my assistant, ‘and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the League.’

“‘And he is admirably suited for it,’ the other answered. ‘He has every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.’ He took a step backward, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then suddenly he plunged

forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my success.

“‘It would be injustice to hesitate,’ said he. ‘You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.’ With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I yelled with the pain. ‘There is water in your eyes,’ said he, as he released me. ‘I perceive that all is as it should be. But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint. I could tell you tales of cobblers’ wax which would disgust you with human nature.’ He stepped over to the window and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the vacancy was filled. A groan of disappointment came up from below, and the folk all trooped away in different directions, until there was not a red head to be seen except my own and that of the manager.

“‘My name,’ said he, ‘is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?’

“I answered that I had not.

“His face fell immediately.

“‘Dear me!’ he said, gravely, ‘that is very serious indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.’

“My face lengthened at this, Mr. Holmes, for I thought that I was not to have the vacancy after all; but, after thinking it over for a few minutes, he said that it would be all right.

“‘In the case of another,’ said he, ‘the objection might be fatal, but we must stretch a point in favor of

a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?’

“ ‘Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,’ said I.

“ ‘Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!’ said Vincent Spaulding. ‘I shall be able to look after that for you.’

“ ‘What would be the hours?’ I asked.

“ ‘Ten to two.’

“Now a pawnbroker’s business is mostly done of an evening, Mr. Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evenings, which is just before pay-day; so it would suit me very well to earn a little in the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

“ ‘That would suit me very well,’ said I. ‘And the pay?’

“ ‘Is four pounds a week.’

“ ‘And the work?’

“ ‘Is purely nominal.’

“ ‘What do you call purely nominal.’

“ ‘Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don’t comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.’

“ ‘It’s only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,’ said I.

“ ‘No excuse will avail,’ said Mr. Duncan Ross, ‘neither sickness, nor business, nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose your billet.’

“ ‘And the work?’

“ ‘Is to copy out the “Encyclopædia Britannica.” There is the first volume of it in that press. You must

find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be ready to-morrow ?’

“ ‘Certainly,’ I answered.

“ ‘Then, good-by, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the important position which you have been fortunate enough to gain.’ He bowed me out of the room, and I went home with my assistant hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so pleased at my own good fortune.

“ Well, I thought over the matter all day, and by evening I was in low spirits again ; for I had quite persuaded myself that the whole affair must be some great hoax or fraud, though what its object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would pay such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the ‘*Encyclopædia Britannica*.’ Vincent Spaulding did what he could to cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a quill pen and seven sheets of foolscap paper I started off for Pope’s Court.

“ Well, to my surprise and delight everything was as right as possible. The table was set out ready for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross was there to see that I got fairly to work. He started me off upon the letter A, and then he left me ; but he would drop in from time to time to see that all was right with me. At two o’clock he bade me good-day, complimented me upon the amount that I had written, and locked the door of the office after me.

“ This went on day after day, Mr. Holmes, and on Saturday the manager came in and planked down four

golden sovereigns for my week's work. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. By degrees Mr. Duncan Ross took to coming in only once of a morning, and then, after a time, he did not come in at all. Still, of course, I never dared to leave the room for an instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet was such a good one, and suited me so well, that I would not risk the loss of it.

"Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about Abbots, and Archery, and Armor, and Architecture, and Attica, and hoped with diligence that I might get on to the Bs before very long. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly filled a shelf with my writings. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end."

"To an end?"

"Yes, sir. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as usual at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered onto the middle of the panel with a tack. Here it is, and you can read for yourself."

He held up a piece of white card-board, about the size of a sheet of note-paper. It read in this fashion :

"THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE IS DISSOLVED.

Oct. 9, 1890."

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt announcement and the rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so completely overtopped every consideration that we both burst out into a roar of laughter.

"I cannot see that there is anything very funny," cried our client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming head.

"If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere."

"No, no," cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from which he had half risen. "I really wouldn't miss your case for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?"

"I was staggered, sir. I did not know what to do. Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. Finally, I went to the landlord, who is an accountant living on the ground floor, and I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the Red-headed League. He said that he had never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan Ross was. He answered that the name was new to him."

" 'Well,' said I, 'the gentleman at No. 4.'"

" 'What, the red-headed man?'"

" 'Yes.'"

" 'Oh,' said he, 'his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor, and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. He moved out yesterday.'"

" 'Where could I find him?'"

" 'Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17 King Edward Street, near St. Paul's.'"

"I started off, Mr. Holmes, but when I got to that address it was a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever heard of either Mr. William Morris, or Mr. Duncan Ross."

"And what did you do then?" asked Holmes.

"I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any

way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you."

"And you did very wisely," said Holmes. "Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear."

"Grave enough!" said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "Why, I have lost four pound a week."

"As far as you are personally concerned," remarked Holmes, "I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some thirty pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them."

"No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank—if it was a prank—upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two-and-thirty pounds."

"We shall endeavor to clear up these points for you. And, first, one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement—how long had he been with you?"

"About a month then."

"How did he come?"

"In answer to an advertisement."

"Was he the only applicant?"

"No, I had a dozen."

"Why did you pick him?"

"Because he was handy and would come cheap."

"At half wages, in fact."

"Yes."

"What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?"

"Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair in considerable excitement. "I thought as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that a gypsy had done it for him when he was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. "He is still with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your absence?"

"Nothing to complain of, sir. There's never very much to do of a morning."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. To-day is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes, when our visitor had left us, "what do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered, frankly. "It is a most mysterious business."

"As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify. But I must be prompt over this matter."

"What are you going to do, then?" I asked.

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three-pipe

problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes." He curled himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird. I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and indeed was nodding myself, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with the gesture of a man who has made up his mind, and put his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at St. James's Hall this afternoon," he remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do to-day. My practice is never very absorbing."

"Then put on your hat and come. I am going through the City first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that there is a good deal of German music on the programme, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!"

We travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a pokey, little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass, and a few clumps of faded laurel bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with JABEZ WILSON in white letters, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business. Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side, and looked it all over, with his eyes shining brightly between puckered lids. Then he

walked slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Finally he returned to the pawnbroker's and, having thumped vigorously upon the pavement with his stick two or three times, he went up to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

"Thank you," said Holmes, "I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand."

"Third right, fourth left," answered the assistant promptly, closing the door.

"Smart fellow, that," observed Holmes as we walked away. "He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before."

"Evidently," said I, "Mr. Wilson's assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him."

"Not him."

"What then?"

"The knees of his trousers."

"And what did you see?"

"What I expected to see."

"Why did you beat the pavement?"

"My dear Doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We are spies in an enemy's country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. Let us now explore the parts which lie behind it."

The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was one of the main arteries which

convey the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians. It was difficult to realize as we looked at the line of fine shops and stately business premises that they really abutted on the other side upon the faded and stagnant square which we had just quitted.

"Let me see," said Holmes, standing at the corner, and glancing along the line, "I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and McFarlane's carriage-building depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now, Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness, and delicacy, and harmony, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums."

My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer, but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of

his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy ; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his arm-chair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. When I saw him that afternoon so enwrapped in the music at St. James's Hall I felt that an evil time might be coming upon those whom he had set himself to hunt down.

"You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor," he remarked, as we emerged.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This business at Coburg Square is serious."

"Why serious?"

"A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help to-night."

"At what time?"

"Ten will be early enough."

"I shall be at Baker Street at ten."

"Very well. And, I say, Doctor! there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket." He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbors, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen,

and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened, but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque. As I drove home to my house in Kensington I thought over it all, from the extraordinary story of the red-headed copier of the "Encyclopædia" down to the visit to Saxe-Coburg Square, and the ominous words with which he had parted from me. What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed? Where were we going, and what were we to do? I had the hint from Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker's assistant was a formidable man—a man who might play a deep game. I tried to puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair, and set the matter aside until night should bring an explanation.

It was a quarter past nine when I started from home and made my way across the Park, and so through Oxford Street to Baker Street. Two hansoms were standing at the door, and, as I entered the passage, I heard the sound of voices from above. On entering his room, I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men, one of whom I recognized as Peter Jones, the official police agent; while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

"Ha! our party is complete," said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket, and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack. "Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in to-night's adventure."

"We're hunting in couples again, Doctor, you see," said Jones, in his consequential way. "Our friend here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him do the running down."

"I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase," observed Mr. Merryweather, gloomily.

"You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir," said the police agent, loftily. "He has his own little methods, which are, if he won't mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him. It is not too much to say that once or twice, as in that business of the Sholto murder and the Agra treasure, he has been more nearly correct than the official force."

"Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right!" said the stranger, with deference. "Still, I confess that I miss my rubber. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber."

"I think you will find," said Sherlock Holmes, "that you will play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some thirty thousand pounds; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands."

"John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a Royal Duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. I've been on his track for years, and have never set eyes on him yet."

"I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to-night. I've had one or two little turns also with

Mr. John Clay, and I agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is past ten, however, and quite time that we started. If you two will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the second."

Sherlock Holmes was not very communicative during the long drive, and lay back in the cab humming the tunes which he had heard in the afternoon. We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets until we emerged into Farringdon Street.

"We are close there now," my friend remarked. "This fellow Merryweather is a bank director and personally interested in the matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog, and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we are, and they are waiting for us."

We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had found ourselves in the morning. Our cabs were dismissed, and following the guidance of Mr. Merryweather, we passed down a narrow passage, and through a side door which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr. Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all round with crates and massive boxes.

"You are not very vulnerable from above," Holmes remarked, as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

"Nor from below," said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor. Why, dear

me, it sounds quite hollow!" he remarked, looking up in surprise.

"I must really ask you to be a little more quiet," said Holmes, severely. "You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?"

The solemn Mr. Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor, and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely the cracks between the stones. A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again, and put his glass in his pocket.

"We have at least an hour before us," he remarked, "for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at present, Doctor—as no doubt you have divined—in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr. Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present."

"It is our French gold," whispered the director. "We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it."

"Your French gold?"

"Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources, and borrowed, for that purpose, thirty thousand napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The

crate upon which I sit contains two thousand napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the directors have had misgivings upon the subject."

"Which were very well justified," observed Holmes. "And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime, Mr. Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern."

"And sit in the dark?"

"I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and I thought that, as we were a *partie carrée*, you might have your rubber after all. But I see that the enemy's preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and, though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm, unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate, and do you conceal yourselves behind those. Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down."

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front of his lantern, and left us in pitch darkness—such an absolute darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment's notice. To me, with my nerves worked up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the cold, dank air of the vault.

"They have but one retreat," whispered Holmes.

"That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?"

"I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door."

"Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait."

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterward, it was but an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to me that the night must have almost gone, and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position, yet my nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper, heavier inbreath of the bulky Jones from the thin sighing note of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then, without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the centre of the little area of light. For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark again save the single lurid spark, which marked a chink between the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending, tearing sound, one of the broad white stones turned over upon its side, and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed the light of a lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut, boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand on either side of

the aperture, drew itself shoulder high and waist high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another instant he stood at the side of the hole, and was hauling after him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the bags. Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!"

Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes' hunting crop came down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone floor.

"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes, blandly, "you have no chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered, with the utmost coolness. "I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed. You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands," remarked our prisoner, as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists. "You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness also, when you address me, always to say 'sir' and 'please.'"

"All right," said Jones, with a stare and a snigger.

"Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your highness to the police-station."

"That is better," said John Clay, serenely. He made a sweeping bow to the three of us, and walked quietly off in the custody of the detective.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Merryweather, as we followed them from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained, in the early hours of the morning, as we sat over a glass of whiskey and soda in Baker Street, "it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the 'Encyclopædia,' must be to get this not over-bright pawn-broker out of the way for a number of hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but really it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the color of his accomplice's hair. The four pounds a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? They put in the advertisement, one rogue has the temporary office, the other rogue

incites the man to apply for it, and together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and such an expenditure as they were at. It must then be something out of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant, and found that I had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in London. He was doing something in the cellar—something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw that the City

and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem. When you drove home after the concert I called upon Scotland Yard, and upon the chairman of the bank of directors, with the result that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their attempt to-night?" I asked.

"Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson's presence; in other words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night."

"You reasoned it out beautifully," I exclaimed, in unfeigned admiration. "It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true."

"It saved me from ennui," he answered, yawning. "Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so."

"And you are a benefactor of the race," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use," he remarked. "'*L'homme c'est rien—l'œuvre c'est tout,*' as Gustave Flaubert wrote to Georges Sand."

THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY.

By A. CONAN DOYLE.

THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY.

WE were seated at breakfast one morning, my wife and I, when the maid brought in a telegram. It was from Sherlock Holmes, and ran in this way :

"Have you a couple of days to spare? Have just been wired for from the West of England in connection with Boscombe Valley tragedy. Shall be glad if you will come with me. Air and scenery perfect. Leave Paddington by the 11.15."

"What do you say, dear?" said my wife, looking across at me. "Will you go?"

"I really don't know what to say. I have a fairly long list at present."

"Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking a little pale lately. I think that the change would do you good, and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes's cases."

"I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them," I answered. "But if I am to go I must pack at once, for I have only half an hour."

My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller. My wants were few and simple, so that in less than the time stated I was in a cab with my valise, rattling away to Paddington Station. Sherlock Holmes was pacing up

and down the platform, his tall, gaunt figure made even gaunter and taller by his long gray travelling cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.

"It is really very good of you to come, Watson," said he. "It makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless or else biassed. If you will keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets."

We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of papers which Holmes had brought with him. Among these he rummaged and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until we were past Reading. Then he suddenly rolled them all into a gigantic ball, and tossed them up on to the rack.

"Have you heard anything of the case?" he asked.

"Not a word. I have not seen a paper for some days."

"The London press has not had very full accounts. I have just been looking through all the recent papers in order to master the particulars. It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple cases which are so extremely difficult."

"That sounds a little paradoxical."

"But it is profoundly true. Singularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult is it to bring it home. In this case, however, they have established a very serious case against the son of the murdered man."

"It is a murder, then?"

"Well, it is conjectured to be so. I shall take nothing for granted until I have the opportunity of looking personally into it. I will explain the state of things to you, as far as I have been able to understand it, in a very few words.

“Boscombe Valley is a country district not very far from Ross, in Herefordshire. The largest landed proprietor in that part is a Mr. John Turner, who made his money in Australia, and returned some years ago to the old country. One of the farms which he held, that of Hatherley, was let to Mr. Charles McCarthy, who was also an ex-Australian. The men had known each other in the Colonies, so that it was not unnatural that when they came to settle down they should do so as near each other as possible. Turner was apparently the richer man, so McCarthy became his tenant, but still remained, it seems, upon terms of perfect equality, as they were frequently together. McCarthy had one son, a lad of eighteen, and Turner had an only daughter of the same age, but neither of them had wives living. They appear to have avoided the neighboring English families, and to have led retired lives, though both the McCarthys were fond of sport, and were frequently seen at the race meetings of the neighborhood. McCarthy kept two servants—a man and a girl. Turner had a considerable household, some half-dozen at the least. That is as much as I have been able to gather about the families. Now for the facts.

“On June 3d, that is, on Monday last, McCarthy left his house at Hatherley about three in the afternoon, and walked down to the Boscombe Pool, which is a small lake formed by the spreading out of the stream which runs down the Boscombe Valley. He had been out with his serving-man in the morning at Ross, and he had told the man that he must hurry, as he had an appointment of importance to keep at three. From that appointment he never came back alive.

“From Hatherley Farmhouse to the Boscombe Pool is a quarter of a mile, and two people saw him as he passed over this ground. One was an old woman, whose name

is not mentioned, and the other was William Crowder, a gamekeeper in the employ of Mr. Turner. Both these witnesses depose that Mr. McCarthy was walking alone. The gamekeeper adds that within a few minutes of his seeing Mr. McCarthy pass he had seen his son, Mr. James McCarthy, going the same way with a gun under his arm. To the best of his belief, the father was actually in sight at the time, and the son was following him. He thought no more of the matter until he heard in the evening of the tragedy that had occurred.

“The two McCarthys were seen after the time when William Crowder, the gamekeeper, lost sight of them. The Boscombe Pool is thickly wooded round, with just a fringe of grass and of reeds round the edge. A girl of fourteen, Patience Moran, who is the daughter of the lodge-keeper of the Boscombe Valley estate, was in one of the woods picking flowers. She states that while she was there she saw, at the border of the wood and close by the lake, Mr. McCarthy and his son, and that they appeared to be having a violent quarrel. She heard Mr. McCarthy the elder using very strong language to his son, and she saw the latter raise up his hand as if to strike his father. She was so frightened by their violence that she ran away, and told her mother when she reached home that she had left the two McCarthys quarrelling near Boscombe Pool, and that she was afraid that they were going to fight. She had hardly said the words when young Mr. McCarthy came running up to the lodge to say that he had found his father dead in the wood, and to ask for the help of the lodge-keeper. He was much excited, without either his gun or his hat, and his right hand and sleeve were observed to be stained with fresh blood. On following him they found the dead body stretched out upon the grass beside the Pool. The head had been beaten in by

repeated blows of some heavy and blunt weapon. The injuries were such as might very well have been inflicted by the butt-end of his son's gun, which was found lying on the grass within a few paces of the body. Under these circumstances the young man was instantly arrested, and a verdict of 'Wilful Murder' having been returned at the inquest on Tuesday, he was on Wednesday brought before the magistrates at Ross, who have referred the case to the next assizes. Those are the main facts of the case as they came out before the coroner and at the police court."

"I could hardly imagine a more damning case," I remarked. "If ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal, it does so here."

"Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing," answered Holmes, thoughtfully. "It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different. It must be confessed, however, that the case looks exceedingly grave against the young man, and it is very possible that he is indeed the culprit. There are several people in the neighborhood, however, and among them Miss Turner, the daughter of the neighboring landowner, who believe in his innocence, and who have retained Lestrade, whom you may recollect in connection with the Study in Scarlet, to work out the case in his interest. Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the case to me, and hence it is that two middle-aged gentlemen are flying westward at fifty miles an hour, instead of quietly digesting their breakfasts at home."

"I am afraid," said I, "that the facts are so obvious that you will find little credit to be gained out of this case."

"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious

fact," he answered, laughing. "Besides, we may chance to hit upon some other obvious facts which may have been by no means obvious to Mr. Lestrade. You know me too well to think that I am boasting when I say that I shall either confirm or destroy his theory by means which he is quite incapable of employing, or even of understanding. To take the first example to hand, I very clearly perceive that in your bedroom the window is upon the right-hand side, and yet I question whether Mr. Lestrade would have noted even so self-evident a thing as that."

"How on earth——!"

"My dear fellow, I know you well. I know the military neatness which characterizes you. You shave every morning, and in this season you shave by the sunlight, but since your shaving is less and less complete as we get further back on the left side, until it becomes positively slovenly as we get round the angle of the jaw, it is surely very clear that that side is less well illuminated than the other. I could not imagine a man of your habits looking at himself in an equal light, and being satisfied with such a result. I only quote this as a trivial example of observation and inference. Therein lies my *métier*, and it is just possible that it may be of some service in the investigation which lies before us. There are one or two minor points which were brought out in the inquest, and which are worth considering."

"What are they?"

"It appears that his arrest did not take place at once, but after the return to Hatherley Farm. On the inspector of constabulary informing him that he was a prisoner, he remarked that he was not surprised to hear it, and that it was no more than his deserts. This observation of his had the natural effect of removing any traces of doubt

which might have remained in the minds of the coroner's jury."

"It was a confession," I ejaculated.

"No, for it was followed by a protestation of innocence."

"Coming on the top of such a damning series of events, it was at least a most suspicious remark."

"On the contrary," said Holmes, "it is the brightest rift which I can at present see in the clouds. However innocent he might be, he could not be such an absolute imbecile as not to see that the circumstances were very black against him. Had he appeared surprised at his own arrest, or feigned indignation at it, I should have looked upon it as highly suspicious, because such surprise or anger would not be natural under the circumstances, and yet might appear to be the best policy to a scheming man. His frank acceptance of the situation marks him as either an innocent man, or else as a man of considerable self-restraint and firmness. As to his remark about his deserts, it was also not unnatural if you consider that he stood beside the dead body of his father, and that there is no doubt that he had that very day so far forgotten his filial duty as to bandy words with him, and even, according to the little girl whose evidence is so important, to raise his hand as if to strike him. The self-reproach and contrition which are displayed in his remark appear to me to be the signs of a healthy mind, rather than of a guilty one."

I shook my head. "Many men have been hanged on far slighter evidence," I remarked.

"So they have. And many men have been wrongfully hanged."

"What is the young man's own account of the matter?"

"It is, I am afraid, not very encouraging to his supporters, though there are one or two points in it which are suggestive. You will find it here, and may read it for yourself."

He picked out from his bundle a copy of the local Herefordshire paper, and having turned down the sheet, he pointed out the paragraph in which the unfortunate young man had given his own statement of what had occurred. I settled myself down in the corner of the carriage, and read it very carefully. It ran in this way :—

"Mr. James McCarthy, the only son of the deceased, was then called, and gave evidence as follows : I had been away from home for three days at Bristol, and had only just returned upon the morning of last Monday, the 3d. My father was absent from home at the time of my arrival, and I was informed by the maid that he had driven over to Ross with John Cobb, the groom. Shortly after my return I heard the wheels of his trap in the yard, and, looking out of my window, I saw him get out and walk rapidly out of the yard, though I was not aware in which direction he was going. I then took my gun, and strolled out in the direction of the Roscombe Pool, with the intention of visiting the rabbit warren which is upon the other side. On my way I saw William Crowder, the gamekeeper, as he has stated in his evidence ; but he is mistaken in thinking that I was following my father. I had no idea that he was in front of me. When about a hundred yards from the Pool I heard a cry of "Cooee !" which was a usual signal between my father and myself. I then hurried forward, and found him standing by the Pool. He appeared to be much surprised at seeing me, and asked me rather roughly what I was doing there. A conversation ensued, which led to high words, and almost to blows, for my father was a man

of a very violent temper. Seeing that his passion was becoming ungovernable, I left him, and returned toward Hatherley Farm. I had not gone more than one hundred and fifty yards, however, when I heard a hideous outcry behind me, which caused me to run back again. I found my father expiring upon the ground, with his head terribly injured. I dropped my gun, and held him in my arms, but he almost instantly expired. I knelt beside him for some minutes, and then made my way to Mr. Turner's lodge-keeper, his house being the nearest, to ask for assistance. I saw no one near my father when I returned, and I have no idea how he came by his injuries. He was not a popular man, being somewhat cold and forbidding in his manners ; but he had, as far as I know, no active enemies. I know nothing further of the matter."

"The Coroner : Did your father make any statement to you before he died ?"

"Witness : He mumbled a few words, but I could only catch some allusion to a rat.

"The Coroner : What did you understand by that ?

"Witness : It conveyed no meaning to me. I thought that he was delirious.

"The Coroner : What was the point upon which you and your father had this final quarrel ?

"Witness : I should prefer not to answer.

"The Coroner : I am afraid I must press it.

"Witness : It is really impossible for me to tell you. I can assure you that it has nothing to do with the sad tragedy which followed.

"The Coroner : That is for the Court to decide. I need not point out to you that your refusal to answer will prejudice your case considerably in any future proceedings which may arise.

"Witness : I must still refuse.

"The Coroner: I understand that the cry of 'Cooee' was a common signal between you and your father?"

"Witness: It was.

"The Coroner: How was it, then, that he uttered it before he saw you, and before he even knew that you had returned from Bristol?"

"Witness (with considerable confusion): I do not know.

"A Juryman: Did you see nothing that aroused your suspicion when you returned on hearing the cry, and found your father fatally injured?"

"Witness: Nothing definite.

"The Coroner: What do you mean?"

"Witness: I was so disturbed and excited as I rushed out into the open, that I could think of nothing except of my father. Yet I have a vague impression that as I ran forward something lay upon the ground, to the left of me. It seemed to me to be something gray in color, a coat of some sort, or a plaid perhaps. When I rose from my father I looked round for it, but it was gone.

"Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?"

"Yes, it was gone."

"You cannot say what it was?"

"No; I had a feeling something was there."

"How far from the body?"

"A dozen yards or so."

"And how far from the edge of the wood?"

"About the same."

"Then if it was removed it was while you were within a dozen yards of it?"

"Yes, but with my back toward it."

"This concluded the examination of the witness."

"I see," said I, as I glanced down the column, "that

the coroner in his concluding remarks was rather severe upon young McCarthy. He calls attention, and with reason, to the discrepancy about his father having signalled to him before seeing him, also to his refusal to give details of his conversation with his father, and his singular account of his father's dying words. They are all, as he remarks, very much against the son."

Holmes laughed softly to himself, and stretched himself out upon the cushioned seat. "Both you and the coroner have been at some pains," said he, "to signal out the very strongest points in the young man's favor. Don't you see that you alternately give him credit for having too much imagination and too little? Too little, if he could not invent a cause of quarrel which would give him the sympathy of the jury; too much, if he evolved from his own inner consciousness anything so *outré* as a dying reference to a rat, and the incident of the vanishing cloth. No, sir, I shall approach this case from the point of view that what this young man says is true, and we shall see whither this hypothesis will lead us. And now here is my own pocket Petrarch, and not another word shall I say of this case until we are on the scene of action. We lunch at Swindon, and I see that we shall be there in twenty minutes."

It was nearly four o'clock when we at last, after passing through the beautiful Stroud Valley, and over the broad gleaming Severn, found ourselves at the pretty little country town of Ross. A lean, ferret-like man, furtive and shy-looking, was waiting for us upon the platform. In spite of the light brown dust-coat and leather leggings which he wore in deference to his rustic surroundings, I had no difficulty in recognizing Lestrade, of Scotland Yard. With him we drove to the Hereford Arms, where a room had already been engaged for us.

"I have ordered a carriage," said Lestrade, as we sat over a cup of tea. "I knew your energetic nature, and that you would not be happy until you had been on the scene of the crime."

"It was very nice and complimentary of you," Holmes answered. "It is entirely a question of barometric pressure."

Lestrade looked startled. "I do not quite follow," he said.

"How is the glass? Twenty-nine, I see. No wind, and not a cloud in the sky. I have a case full of cigarettes here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country hotel abomination. I do not think that it is probable that I shall use the carriage to-night."

Lestrade laughed indulgently. "You have, no doubt, already formed your conclusions from the newspapers," he said. "The case is as plain as a pikestaff, and the more one goes into it the plainer it becomes. Still, of course, one can't refuse a lady, and such a very positive one, too. She had heard of you, and would have your opinion, though I repeatedly told her that there was nothing which you could do which I had not already done. Why, bless my soul! here is her carriage at the door."

He had hardly spoken before there rushed into the room one of the most lovely young women that I have ever seen in my life. Her violet eyes shining, her lips parted, a pink flush upon her cheeks, all thought of her natural reserve lost in her overpowering excitement and concern.

"Oh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" she cried, glancing from one to the other of us, and finally, with a woman's quick intuition, fastening upon my companion, "I am so glad that you have come. I have driven down to tell you so.

I know that James didn't do it. I know it, and I want you to start upon your work knowing it, too. Never let yourself doubt upon that point. We have known each other since we were little children, and I know his faults as no one else does ; but he is too tender-hearted to hurt a fly. Such a charge is absurd to anyone who really knows him."

"I hope we can clear him, Miss Turner," said Sherlock Holmes. "You may rely upon my doing all that I can."

"But you have read the evidence. You have formed some conclusion? Do you not see some loop-hole, some flaw? Do you not yourself think that he is innocent?"

"I think that it is very probable."

"There now!" she cried, throwing back her head, and looking defiantly at Lestrade. "You hear! He gives me hopes."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am afraid that my colleague has been a little quick in forming his conclusions," he said.

"But he is right. Oh! I know that he is right. James never did it. And about his quarrel with his father, I am sure that the reason why he would not speak about it to the coroner was because I was concerned in it."

"In what way?" asked Holmes.

"It is no time for me to hide anything. James and his father had many disagreements about me. Mr. McCarthy was very anxious that there should be a marriage between us. James and I have always loved each other as brother and sister, but of course he is young, and has seen very little of life yet, and—and—well, he naturally did not wish to do anything like that yet. So there were quarrels, and this, I am sure, was one of them."

"And your father?" asked Holmes. "Was he in favor of such a union?"

"No, he was averse to it also. No one but Mr. McCarthy was in favor of it." A quick blush passed over her fresh young face as Holmes shot one of his keen, questioning glances at her.

"Thank you for this information," said he. "May I see your father if I call to-morrow?"

"I am afraid the doctor won't allow it."

"The doctor?"

"Yes. Have you not heard? Poor father has never been strong for years back, but this has broken him down completely. He has taken to his bed, and Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck, and that his nervous system is shattered. Mr. McCarthy was the only man alive who had known dad in the old days in Victoria."

"Ha! In Victoria! That is important."

"Yes, at the mines."

"Quite so; at the gold mines, where, as I understand, Mr. Turner made his money."

"Yes, certainly."

"Thank you, Miss Turner. You have been of material assistance to me."

"You will tell me if you have any news to-morrow. No doubt you will go to the prison to see James. Oh, if you do, Mr. Holmes, do tell him that I know him to be innocent."

"I will, Miss Turner."

"I must go home now, for dad is very ill, and he misses me so if I leave him. Good-by, and God help you in your undertaking." She hurried from the room as impulsively as she had entered, and we heard the wheels of her carriage rattle off down the street.

"I am ashamed of you, Holmes," said Lestrade, with dignity, after a few minutes' silence. "Why should you

rise up hopes which you are bound to disappoint? I am not over tender of heart, but I call it cruel."

"I think that I see my way to clearing James McCarthy," said Holmes. "Have you an order to see him in prison?"

"Yes, but only for you and me."

"Then I shall reconsider my resolution about going out. We have still time to take a train to Hereford and see him to-night?"

"Ample."

"Then let us do so. Watson, I fear that you will find it very slow, but I shall only be away a couple of hours."

I walked down to the station with them, and then wandered through the streets of the little town, finally returning to the hotel, where I lay upon the sofa and tried to interest myself in a yellow-backed novel. The puny plot of the story was so thin, however, when compared to the deep mystery through which we were groping, and I found my attention wander so continually from the fiction to the fact, that I at last flung it across the room and gave myself up entirely to a consideration of the events of the day. Supposing that this unhappy young man's story was absolutely true, then what hellish thing, what absolutely unforeseen and extraordinary calamity could have occurred between the time when he parted from his father and the moment when, drawn back by his screams, he rushed into the glade? It was something terrible and deadly. What could it be? Might not the nature of the injuries reveal something to my medical instincts? I rang the bell and called for the weekly county paper which contained a verbatim account of the inquest. In the surgeon's deposition it was stated that the posterior third of the left parietal bone and the

left half of the occipital bone had been shattered by a heavy blow from a blunt weapon. I marked the spot upon my own head. Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. That was to some extent in favor of the accused, as when seen quarrelling he was face to face with his father. Still, it did not go for very much, for the older man might have turned his back before the blow fell. Still, it might be worth while to call Holmes's attention to it. Then there was the peculiar dying reference to a rat. What could that mean? It could not be delirium. A man dying from a sudden blow does not commonly become delirious. No, it was more likely to be an attempt to explain how he met his fate. But what could it indicate? I cudgelled my brains to find some possible explanation. And then the incident of the gray cloth seen by young McCarthy. If that were true, the murderer must have dropped some part of his dress, presumably his overcoat, in his flight, and must have had the hardihood to return and to carry it away at the instant when the son was kneeling with his back turned not a dozen paces off. What a tissue of mysteries and improbabilities the whole thing was! I did not wonder at Lestrade's opinion, and yet I had so much faith in Sherlock Holmes's insight that I could not lose hope as long as every fresh fact seemed to strengthen his conviction of young McCarthy's innocence.

It was late before Sherlock Holmes returned. He came back alone, for Lestrade was staying in lodgings in the town.

"The glass still keeps very high," he remarked, as he sat down. "It is of importance that it should not rain before we are able to go over the ground. On the other hand, a man should be at his very best and keenest for such nice work as that, and I did not wish to do it when

fagged by a long journey. I have seen young McCarthy."

"And what did you learn from him?"

"Nothing."

"Could he throw no light?"

"None at all. I was inclined to think at one time that he knew who had done it, and was screening him or her, but I am convinced now that he is as puzzled as everyone else. He is not a very quick-witted youth, though comely to look at, and, I should think, sound at heart."

"I cannot admire his taste," I remarked, "if it is indeed a fact that he was averse to a marriage with so charming a young lady as this Miss Turner."

"Ah, thereby hangs a rather painful tale. This fellow is madly, insanely in love with her, but some two years ago, when he was only a lad, and before he really knew her, for she had been away five years at a boarding school, what does the idiot do but get into the clutches of a barmaid in Bristol and marry her at a registry office? No one knows a word of the matter, but you can imagine how maddening it must be to him to be upbraided for not doing what he would give his very eyes to do, but what he knows to be absolutely impossible. It was sheer frenzy of this sort which made him throw his hands up into the air when his father, at their last interview, was goading him on to propose to Miss Turner. On the other hand, he had no means of supporting himself, and his father, who was by all accounts a very hard man, would have thrown him over utterly had he known the truth. It was with his barmaid wife that he had spent the last three days in Bristol, and his father did not know where he was. Mark that point. It is of importance. Good has come out of evil, however, for the barmaid, finding from the papers that he is in serious trouble, and likely

to be hanged, has thrown him over utterly, and has written to him to say that she has a husband already in the Bermuda Dockyard, so that there is really no tie between them. I think that that bit of news has consoled young McCarthy for all that he has suffered."

"But if he is innocent, who has done it?"

"Ah! who? I would call your attention very particularly to two points. One is that the murdered man had an appointment with someone at the Pool, and that the someone could not have been his son, for his son was away, and he did not know when he would return. The second is that the murdered man was heard to cry 'Cooee!' before he knew that his son had returned. Those are the crucial points upon which the case depends. And now let us talk about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all minor matters until to-morrow."

There was no rain, as Holmes had foretold, and the morning broke bright and cloudless. At nine o'clock Lestrade called for us with the carriage, and we set off for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool.

"There is serious news this morning," Lestrade observed. "It is said that Mr. Turner, of the Hall, is so ill that his life is despaired of."

"An elderly man, I presume?" said Holmes.

"About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time. This business has had a very bad effect upon him. He was an old friend of McCarthy's, and, I may add, a great benefactor to him, for I have learned that he gave him Hatherley Farm rent free."

"Indeed, that is interesting," said Holmes.

"Oh, yes! In a hundred other ways he has helped him. Everybody about here speaks of his kindness to him."

"Really! Does it not strike you as a little singular that this McCarthy, who appears to have had little of his own, and to have been under such obligations to Turner, should still talk of marrying his son to Turner's daughter, who is, presumably, heiress to the estate, and that in such a very cocksure manner, as if it were merely a case of a proposal and all else would follow? It is the more strange, since we know that Turner himself was averse to the idea. The daughter told us as much. Do you not deduce something from that?"

"We have got to the deductions and the inferences," said Lestrade, winking at me. "I find it hard enough to tackle facts, Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies."

"You are right," said Holmes, demurely; "you do find it very hard to tackle the facts."

"Anyhow, I have grasped one fact which you seem to find it difficult to get hold of," replied Lestrade, with some warmth.

"And that is?"

"That McCarthy, senior, met his death from McCarthy, junior, and that all theories to the contrary are the merest moonshine."

"Well, moonshine is a brighter thing than fog," said Holmes, laughing. "But I am very much mistaken if this is not Hatherley Farm upon the left."

"Yes, that is it." It was a widespread, comfortable-looking building, two-storied, slate-roofed, with great yellow blotches of lichen upon the gray walls. The drawn blinds and the smokeless chimneys, however, gave it a stricken look, as though the weight of this horror still lay heavy upon it. We called at the door, when the maid, at Holmes's request, showed us the boots which her master wore at the time of his death, and also a pair of the son's,

though not the pair which he had then had. Having measured these very carefully from seven or eight different points, Holmes desired to be led to the courtyard, from which we all followed the winding track which led to Boscombe Pool.

Sherlock Holmes was transformed when he was hot upon such a scent as this. Men who had only known the quiet thinker and logician of Baker Street would have failed to recognize him. His face flushed and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard, black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter. His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long, sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a purely animal lust for the chase, and his mind was so absolutely concentrated upon the matter before him, that a question or remark fell unheeded upon his ears, or at the most only provoked a quick, impatient snarl in reply. Swiftly and silently he made his way along the track which ran through the meadows, and so by way of the woods to the Boscombe Pool. It was damp, marshy ground, as is all that district, and there were marks of many feet, both upon the path and amid the short grass which bounded it on either side. Sometimes Holmes would hurry on, sometimes stop dead, and once he made quite a little *détour* into the meadow. Lestrade and I walked behind him, the detective indifferent and contemptuous, while I watched my friend with the interest which sprang from the conviction that every one of his actions was directed toward a definite end.

The Boscombe Pool, which is a little reed-girt sheet of water some fifty yards across, is situated at the boundary between the Hatherley Farm and the private park of the wealthy Mr. Turner. Above the woods which lined it

upon the further side we could see the red jutting pinacles which marked the sight of the rich land-owner's dwelling. On the Hatherley side of the pool the woods grew very thick, and there was a narrow belt of sodden grass twenty paces across between the edge of the trees and the reeds which lined the lake. Lestrade showed us the exact spot at which the body had been found, and, indeed, so moist was the ground, that I could plainly see the traces which had been left by the fall of the stricken man. To Holmes, as I could see by his eager face and peering eyes, very many other things were to be read upon the trampled grass. He ran round, like a dog who is picking up a scent, and then turned upon my companion.

"What did you go into the pool for?" he asked.

"I fished about with a rake. I thought there might be some weapon or other trace. But how on earth——"

"Oh, tut, tut! I have no time! That left foot of yours with its inward twist is all over the place. A mole could trace it, and there it vanishes among the reeds. Oh, how simple it would all have been had I been here before they came like a herd of buffalo and wallowed all over it. Here is where the party with the lodge-keeper came, and they have covered all tracks for six or eight feet round the body. But there are three separate tracks of the same feet." He drew out a lens, and lay down upon his waterproof to have a better view, talking all the time rather to himself than to us. "These are young McCarthy's feet. Twice he was walking, and once he ran swiftly so that the soles are deeply marked, and the heels hardly visible. That bears out his story. He ran when he saw his father on the ground. Then here are the father's feet as he paced up and down. What is this, then? It is the butt-end of the gun as the son stood listening. And this?"

Ha, ha! What have we here? Tip-toes! tip-toes! Square too, quite unusual boots! They come, they go, they come again—of course that was for the cloak. Now where did they come from?" He ran up and down, sometimes losing, sometimes finding the track until we were well within the edge of the wood, and under the shadow of a great beech, the largest tree in the neighborhood. Holmes traced his way to the further side of this, and lay down once more upon his face with a little cry of satisfaction. For a long time he remained there, turning over the leaves and dried sticks, gathering up what seemed to me to be dust into an envelope, and examining with his lens not only the ground, but even the bark of the tree as far as he could reach. A jagged stone was lying among the moss, and this also he carefully examined and retained. Then he followed a pathway through the wood until he came to the high road, where all traces were lost.

"It has been a case of considerable interest," he remarked, returning to his natural manner. "I fancy that this gray house on the right must be the lodge. I think that I will go in and have a word with Moran, and perhaps write a little note. Having done that, we may drive back to our luncheon. You may walk to the cab, and I shall be with you presently."

It was about ten minutes before we regained our cab, and drove back into Ross, Holmes still carrying with him the stone which he had picked up in the wood.

"This may interest you, Lestrade," he remarked, holding it out. "The murder was done with it."

"I see no marks."

"There are none."

"How do you know, then?"

"The grass was growing under it. It had only lain there a few days. There was no sign of a place whence it

had been taken. It corresponds with the injuries. There is no sign of any other weapon."

"And the murderer?"

"Is a tall man, left-handed, limps with the right leg, wears thick-soled shooting boots and a gray cloak, smokes Indian cigars, uses a cigar-holder, and carries a blunt pen-knife in his pocket. There are several other indications, but these may be enough to aid us in our search."

Lestrade laughed. "I am afraid that I am still a sceptic," he said. "Theories are all very well, but we have to deal with a hard-headed British jury."

"*Nous verrons*," answered Holmes, calmly. "You work your own method, and I shall work mine. I shall be busy this afternoon, and shall probably return to London by the evening train."

"And leave your case unfinished?"

"No, finished."

"But the mystery?"

"It is solved."

"Who was the criminal, then?"

"The gentleman I describe."

"But who is he?"

"Surely it would not be difficult to find out. This is not such a populous neighborhood."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am a practical man," he said, "and I really cannot undertake to go about the country looking for a left-handed gentleman with a game leg. I should become the laughing-stock of Scotland Yard."

"All right," said Holmes, quietly. "I have given you the chance. Here are your lodgings. Good-by. I shall drop you a line before I leave."

Having left Lestrade at his rooms we drove to our hotel, where we found lunch upon the table. Holmes was silent

and buried in thought, with a pained expression upon his face, as one who finds himself in a perplexing position.

"Look here, Watson," he said, when the cloth was cleared ; "just sit down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't quite know what to do, and I should value your advice. Light a cigar, and let me expound."

"Pray do so."

"Well, now, in considering this case there are two points about young McCarthy's narrative which struck us both instantly, although they impressed me in his favor and you against him. One was the fact that his father should, according to his account, cry 'Cooee!' before seeing him. The other was his singular dying reference to a rat. He mumbled several words, you understand, but that was all that caught the son's ear. Now from this double point our research must commence, and we will begin it by presuming that what the lad says is absolutely true."

"What of this 'Cooee!' then?"

"Well, obviously it could not have been meant for the son. The son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. It was mere chance that he was within earshot. The 'Cooee!' was meant to attract the attention of whoever it was that he had the appointment with. But 'Cooee' is a distinctly Australian cry, and one which is used between Australians. There is a strong presumption that the person whom McCarthy expected to meet him at Boscombe Pool was someone who had been in Australia."

"What of the rat, then?"

Sherlock Holmes took a folded paper from his pocket and flattened it out on the table. "This is a map of the Colony of Victoria," he said. "I wired to Bristol for it

last night." He put his hand over part of the map. "What do you read?" he asked.

"ARAT," I read.

"And now?" He raised his hand.

"BALLARAT."

"Quite so. That was the word the man uttered, and of which his son only caught the last two syllables. He was trying to utter the name of his murderer. So-and-so, of Ballarat."

"It is wonderful!" I exclaimed.

"It is obvious. And now, you see, I had narrowed the field down considerably. The possession of a gray garment was a third point which, granting the son's statement to be correct, was a certainty. We have come now out of mere vagueness to the definite conception of an Australian from Ballarat with a gray cloak."

"Certainly."

"And one who was at home in the district, for the pool can only be approached by the farm or by the estate, where strangers could hardly wander."

"Quite so."

"Then comes our expedition of to-day. By an examination of the ground I gained the trifling details which I gave to that inbecile, Lestrade, as to the personality of the criminal."

"But how did you gain them?"

"You know my method. It is founded upon the observance of trifles."

"His height, I know, that you might roughly judge from the length of his stride. His boots, too, might be told from their traces."

"Yes, they were peculiar boots."

"But his lameness?"

"The impression of his right foot was always less dis-

tinct than his left. He put less weight upon it. Why? Because he limped—he was lame.”

“But his left-handedness.”

“You were yourself struck by the nature of the injury as recorded by the surgeon at the inquest. The blow was struck from immediately behind, and yet was upon the left side. Now, how can that be unless it were by a left-handed man? He had stood behind that tree during the interview between the father and son. He had even smoked there. I found the ash of a cigar, which my special knowledge of tobacco ashes enabled me to pronounce as an Indian cigar. I have, as you know, devoted some attention to this, and written a little monograph on the ashes of one hundred and forty different varieties of pipe, cigar, and cigarette tobacco. Having found the ash, I then looked round and discovered the stump among the moss where he had tossed it. It was an Indian cigar, of the variety which are rolled in Rotterdam.”

“And the cigar-holder?”

“I could see that the end had not been in his mouth. Therefore he used a holder. The tip had been cut off, not bitten off, but the cut was not a clean one, so I deduced a blunt penknife.”

“Holmes,” I said, “you have drawn a net round this man from which he cannot escape, and you have saved an innocent human life as truly as if you had cut the cord which was hanging him. I see the direction in which all this points. The culprit is——”

“Mr. John Turner,” cried the hotel waiter, opening the door of our sitting-room, and ushering in a visitor.

The man who entered was a strange and impressive figure. His slow, limping step and bowed shoulders gave the appearance of decrepitude, and yet his hard, deep-lined, craggy features, and his enormous limbs showed

that he was possessed of unusual strength of body and of character. His tangled beard, grizzled hair, and outstanding, drooping eyebrows combined to give an air of dignity and power to his appearance, but his face was of an ashen white, while his lips and the corners of his nostrils were tinged with a shade of blue. It was clear to me at a glance that he was in the grip of some deadly and chronic disease.

"Pray sit down on the sofa," said Holmes, gently. "You had my note?"

"Yes, the lodge-keeper brought it up. You said that you wished to see me here to avoid scandal."

"I thought people would talk if I went to the Hall."

"And why did you wish to see me?" He looked across at my companion with despair in his weary eyes, as though his question were already answered.

"Yes," said Holmes, answering the look rather than the words. "It is so. I know all about McCarthy."

The old man sank his face in his hands. "God help me!" he cried. "But I would not have let the young man come to harm. I give you my word that I would have spoken out if it went against him at the Assizes."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Holmes, gravely.

"I would have spoken now had it not been for my dear girl. It would break her heart—it will break her heart when she hears that I am arrested."

"It may not come to that," said Holmes.

"What!"

"I am no official agent. I understand that it was your daughter who required my presence here, and I am acting in her interests. Young McCarthy must be got off, however."

"I am a dying man," said old Turner. "I have had diabetes for years. My doctor says it is a question whether

I shall live a month. Yet I would rather die under my own roof than in a jail."

Holmes rose and sat down at the table with his pen in his hand and a bundle of paper before him. "Just tell us the truth," he said. "I shall jot down the facts. You will sign it, and Watson here can witness it. Then I could produce your confession at the last extremity to save young McCarthy. I promise you that I shall not use it unless it is absolutely needed."

"It's as well," said the old man; "it's a question whether I shall live to the Assizes, so it matters little to me, but I should wish to spare Alice the shock. And now I will make the thing clear to you; it has been a long time in the acting, but will not take me long to tell.

"You didn't know this dead man, McCarthy. He was a devil incarnate. I tell you that. God keep you out of the clutches of such a man as he. His grip has been upon me these twenty years, and he has blasted my life. I'll tell you first how I came to be in his power.

"It was in the early sixties at the diggings. I was a young chap then, hot-blooded and reckless, ready to turn my hand to anything; I got among bad companions, took to drink, had no luck with my claim, took to the bush, and in a word became what you would call over here a highway robber. There were six of us, and we had a wild, free life of it, sticking up a station from time to time, or stopping the wagons on the road to the diggings. Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I went under, and our party is still remembered in the colony as the Ballarat Gang.

"One day a gold convoy came down from Ballarat to Melbourne, and we lay in wait for it and attacked it. There were six troopers and six of us, so it was a close thing, but we emptied four of their saddles at the first volley. Three of our boys were killed, however, before

we got the swag. I put my pistol to the head of the wagon-driver, who was this very man McCarthy. I wish to the Lord that I had shot him then, but I spared him, though I saw his wicked little eyes fixed on my face, as though to remember every feature. We got away with the gold, became wealthy men, and made our way over to England without being suspected. There I parted from my old pals, and determined to settle down to a quiet and respectable life. I bought this estate, which chanced to be in the market, and I set myself to do a little good with my money, to make up for the way in which I had earned it. I married, too, and though my wife died young, she left me my dear little Alice. Even when she was just a baby her wee hand seemed to lead me down the right path as nothing else had ever done. In a word, I turned over a new leaf, and did my best to make up for the past. All was going well when McCarthy laid his grip upon me.

"I had gone up to town about an investment, and I met him in Regent Street with hardly a coat to his back or a boot to his foot.

" 'Here we are, Jack,' says he, touching me on the arm ; 'we'll be as good as a family to you. There's two of us, me and my son, and you can have the keeping of us. If you don't—it's a fine, law-abiding country is England, and there's always a policeman within hail.'

"Well, down they came to the West country, there was no shaking them off, and there they have lived rent free on my best land ever since. There was no rest for me, no peace, no forgetfulness; turn where I would, there was his cunning, grinning face at my elbow. It grew worse as Alice grew up, for he soon saw I was more afraid of her knowing my past than of the police. Whatever he wanted he must have, and whatever it was I gave him without

question—land, money, houses—until at last he asked a thing which I could not give. He asked for Alice.

“His son, you see, had grown up, and so had my girl, and as I was known to be in weak health, it seemed a fine stroke to him that his lad should step into the whole property. But there I was firm. I would not have his cursed stock mixed with mine; not that I had any dislike to the lad, but his blood was in him, and that was enough. I stood firm. McCarthy threatened. I braved him to do his worst. We were to meet at the pool midway between our houses to talk it over.

“When I went down there I found him talking with his son, so I smoked a cigar, and waited behind a tree until he should be alone. But as I listened to his talk all that was black and bitter in me seemed to come uppermost. He was urging his son to marry my daughter with as little regard for what she might think as if she were a slut from off the streets. It drove me mad to think that I and all that I held most dear should be in the power of such a man as this. Could I not snap the bond? I was already a dying and a desperate man. Though clear of mind and fairly strong of limb, I knew that my own fate was sealed. But my memory and my girl! Both could be saved, if I could but silence that foul tongue. I did it, Mr. Holmes. I would do it again. Deeply as I have sinned, I have led a life of martyrdom to atone for it. But that my girl should be entangled in the same meshes which held me was more than I could suffer. I struck him down with no more compunction than if he had been some foul and venomous beast. His cry brought back his son; but I had gained the cover of the wood, though I was forced to go back to fetch the cloak which I had dropped in my flight. That is the true story, gentlemen, of all that occurred.”

"Well, it is not for me to judge you," said Holmes, as the old man signed the statement which had been drawn out. "I pray that we may never be exposed to such a temptation."

"I pray not, sir. And what do you intend to do?"

"In view of your health, nothing. You are yourself aware that you will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher Court than the Assizes. I will keep your confession, and if McCarthy is condemned, I shall be forced to use it. If not, it shall never be seen by mortal eye; and your secret, whether you be alive or dead, shall be safe with us."

"Farewell, then," said the old man, solemnly. "Your own death-beds, when they come, will be the easier for the thought of the peace which you have given to mine." Tottering and shaking in all his giant frame, he stumbled slowly from the room.

"God help us!" said Holmes, after a long silence. "Why does Fate play such tricks with poor helpless worms? I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.'"

James McCarthy was acquitted at the Assizes, on the strength of a number of objections which had been drawn out by Holmes, and submitted to the defending counsel. Old Turner lived for seven months after our interview, but he is now dead; and there is every prospect that the son and daughter may come to live happily together, in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their past

... ..
... ..
... ..
... ..
... ..





Date Due

Oct 24

Jul 20

Mar 1

Aug 18

Nov 27

Feb 27

W. S. L.

Library Bureau Cat. no. 1137

PUBLIC LIBRARY
SOUTH ST. PAUL MINN.



